The Last Juror Study Guide

The Last Juror by John Grisham

Contents

Introduction

In *The Last Juror*, published in 2004, John Grisham explores race relations and racism in the American South of the 1970s. Although the title may lead readers to expect a taut courtroom thriller like Grisham's earlier works, this character-driven novel follows the growing relationship between twenty three-year-old Willie Traynor, new owner of the *Ford County Times*, and Calia Ruffin, also known as "Miss Callie," a fifty nine-year old black woman. She is the mother of eight children, seven of whom have earned Ph.D.s—a remarkable accomplishment for the period. The "juror" of the title does refer to an important legal case that acts as the centerpiece for the book—Danny Padgitt's explosive trial for the rape and brutal murder of a young local widow. Convicted of the murder but sentenced to life imprisonment instead of death, Padgitt spends ten years in jail. When he gets out, jurors from his case start to die under mysterious circumstances.

Over the course of the story, Grisham introduces many of Clanton, Mississippi's residents and local characters, people like politicians, war veterans, and decaying aristocracy who make the town colorful and unique.

Author Biography

John Grisham was born on February 18, 1955, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, but for the first twelve years of his life, his family moved frequently so his father, a construction worker, could find work. In 1967, his family settled in Southaven, Mississippi where he became involved in sports.

After his high school graduation, Grisham enrolled at Northwest Junior College in Senatobia, Mississippi, and for a year played baseball for the school team. Restless, he transferred to Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, hoping to become a professional ball player. After the coach at Delta State tactfully pointed out that Grisham was not suited for a baseball career, he transferred to Mississippi State University and studied accounting with the intention of becoming a tax attorney.

Shortly after earning his law degree from the University of Mississippi, Grisham and his wife Renée returned to Southaven. There, Grisham set up a small practice as a defense attorney. In addition, from 1984 to 1990, he served in the Mississippi House of Representatives. The Grishams have two children: a son, Ty, and a daughter, Shea.

Grisham's first book, *A Time to Kill*, was published in 1988. He worked on it as a hobby for three years, getting up early every morning to write before going to work. Though its original print run was five thousand copies, Grisham was satisfied. By then he was working on his second book, a legal thriller titled *The Firm*. A "bootleg" copy circulated around Hollywood, and the film rights were bought before the book was even published. *The Firm* became a bestselling novel of 1991. Eventually, Grisham closed his law practice and quit the state legislature so he could become a full-time writer.

The Last Juror was published in 2004, making it Grisham's seventeenth novel in seventeen years. Some of his bestselling legal thrillers include *The Client, The Pelican Brief, The Chamber, The Rainmaker*, and *The Runaway Jury*, all of which were made into films. He has also written the autobiographical *A Painted House*, and the Christmas tale *Skipping Christmas*, the basis for the film *Christmas with the Kranks*.

Plot Summary

The Last Juror follows the coming of age of Willie Traynor. After college, Willie moves to rural Ford County, Mississippi to work for a small town newspaper as a staff writer. Shortly after his arrival, the paper goes bankrupt and Willie taps his rich grandmother to fund his purchase of the paper. At age 23, Willie has become the publisher and editor of a bankrupt newspaper.

Not long after, Danny Padgitt - the son of a local crime family - rapes and murders a young widow in front of her two children. The horrible story is a newspaperman's dream. Willie covers the news of the crime, as well as the subsequent trial, with vigor. His newspaper thrives as a result.

Meanwhile, Willie interviews Calia Ruffin, a local black woman, for a human-interest story. She and her husband have managed to raise eight children, seven of whom have gone on to become PhDs. Willie and Calia become good friends. In fact, Calia becomes a mother figure to Willie, who lost his mother to anorexia as a child. Willie spends every Thursday having lunch with Calia.

Calia becomes the first woman juror in Ford County and is chosen to sit on the jury during the murder trial of Danny Padgitt. After a series of gripping courtroom scenes, and in spite of Danny's threat to "get" the jury , Danny is convicted of murder. The jury then must decide whether to sentence him to life in prison or give him the death penalty. The jury can't come to a unanimous decision, and Padgitt is sentenced to life in prison.

During Padgitt's prison sentence, life in Ford County continues. Willie's newspaper thrives, and he becomes an influential member of his little town. The reader sees through Willie's eyes what it was like to live in rural Mississippi in the 1970s. There are local elections which compare to Friday night football in importance. There's also controversy over busing and the desegregation of schools. The Vietnam War is raging, and one of the town's young men becomes a casualty. In grappling with all these events and issues, Willie finds his voice and uses his paper as a venue for his opinions.

Then, Danny Padgitt is paroled, just nine years after his conviction. Jurors are being shot one by one. Because of his courtroom threat, Padgitt is the logical suspect. After a third juror is targeted, Padgitt is arrested. At his bail hearing the next morning, shots ring out and Padgitt dies. The gunman turns the gun on himself. He turns out to be the assistant prosecutor of the original murder trial. He was also the lover of the woman who was raped and murdered by Padgitt.

After covering this last dramatic story, Willie sells the newspaper and becomes a millionaire, after having bought it just ten years earlier for fifty thousand dollars. Before he's able to share the news with Calia, however, she dies of a massive heart attack.

Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

The Ford County Times went bankrupt after years of mismanagement. Not long before, Joyner William Traynor (Willie) moved to Ford County, Mississippi to work for the small town newspaper. He had grown up in Memphis, studied journalism at Syracuse and just recently graduated. He had dreamed of traveling the world as a reporter, until a college buddy told him how much money could be made by owning a small town newspaper. When the *Times* went bankrupt, Willie had been working there as a staff reporter for less than two months. He saw an opportunity. Willie got a loan from his wealthy grandmother and bought the paper. At the young age of 23, he became a newspaper publisher. He was still deciding what the paper was to be when Rhoda Kassellaw was brutally raped and murdered.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The author uses this first chapter to set the scene of the book. The reader learns about the newspaper and that it goes bankrupt. The setting is the small, Southern town of Clanton in Ford County, Mississippi. The town is made up of residents who have lived in the area for multiple generations. The townspeople are generally friendly, and everyone seems to know each other and each other's business. This atmosphere is difficult for Willie to get used to. Gossip abounds when Willie, a young man and an outsider, buys their town newspaper. At the end of the chapter, the author begins to create suspense by revealing that the newspaper gains its identity from a very rare occurrence - the brutal rape and murder that has happened in small-town Ford County.

Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Rhoda Kassellaw was a young widow who had been left with two young children. She lived in a town just north of Clanton in Ford County. She kept mostly to herself, but after three years as a widow, Rhoda became lonely. She began hanging out at clubs near the Tennessee state line, an hour's drive from her home. Her killer had followed her home twice before actually making contact with her.

The night of her death, Rhoda put her children to bed as usual and went to her bedroom an hour later, where her killer was waiting for her. He raped her at knifepoint. The noise awoke her children, who walked down the hall to her bedroom. They startled Rhoda and her attacker. She screamed instructions, and they ran to the neighbor's house for help. Their neighbor, Mr. Deece, ran outside to the lawn between their homes just as Rhoda was coming toward him, naked and bloodied. Her last words were "Danny Padgitt. It was Danny Padgitt."

Fleeing the scene in his pickup truck, Danny Padgitt came upon an animal crossing the road, went into the ditch and flipped the truck. He got out of the truck and leaned against it for awhile. Before he knew it, the cops had arrived. The smell of whiskey and all the blood made the officer suspicious, and he reached for his handcuffs.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, the plot is further developed. The author uses the entire chapter to present the rape and murder of Rhoda Kassellaw. This event is central to the story and one that deeply affects Willie. In a rural area like Ford County, brutal crimes such as this occur very rarely . The murder is pivotal in the development of Willie's newspaper, too. The author presents the rape and murder in graphic detail, which will later become important in the prosecution of the killer.

Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

The Padgitt family lives on what is almost an island, except for a small sliver of land formed by the twisting Big Brown River. The circle of land is known as Padgitt Island. The family acquired the land during Reconstruction. From those early years forward the family produced one of the finest Southern whiskeys. During Prohibition, production continued, and the Padgitt family became a crime family. Although never convicted, the family was suspected of killing law enforcement agents and anyone else that got in their way. To insure their success, the family made sure to "own" the proper people in Ford County, such as the sheriff and politicians.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

The author is further laying the foundation for his story. It is important to understand the Padgitt family and their place among the Ford County residents. Because of their reputation as a crime family, they keep to themselves and are a source of much speculation and fear for the local residents. In fact, no Padgitt has ever been arrested in Ford County before Danny. The author wants the reader to understand the untouchable nature of the family and that they have always gotten away with their crimes.

Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Rhonda's neighbor, Mr. Deece, laid Rhoda down on the front porch swing and called the police and ambulance. The authorities summoned the children's aunt, who came and took the children away.

Willie heard about the crime just before midnight, when his staff photographer called to say he had heard it on the police scanner. Both men had the feeling that this story could be a big break for the newspaper, and they sprung into action.

When they arrived at the jail, Danny Padgitt was being fingerprinted. Willie's photographer, Wiley Meek, recognized Padgitt immediately. Willie, being new in town, didn't know much about the family or its sordid history. Wiley got some photos of Padgitt getting out of the police car, while Willie attempted to interview the Sheriff. The two journalists then drove out to the scene of the crime and interviewed Rhoda's neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Deece, who told them everything.

Willie and Wiley got an early table at the local diner and listened to the townspeople talk of nothing else but the rape and murder. Most of what they heard was town gossip.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

Previous chapters laid the groundwork for the story that really begins in earnest now. The author needed the reader to have all the background of the town, the Padgitt family, the crime and Willie Traynor before he could delve into the story. In this chapter we pick up the story from Willie's point of view, when he finds out about the murder, sees it as the big break for his paper and springs into action.

Willie and his staff photographer go to the jail and see the suspect being booked for the crime. Even though the Sheriff will not confirm that it's Danny Padgitt, Wiley knows his face, and they get a great shot of him getting out of the police car in handcuffs. Then they go to the crime scene and further develop the story by interviewing the couple that found Rhoda.

The importance of the murder story to Willie and his newly-purchased newspaper is central to the book at this point. He is a young city kid thrust in the middle of the most major event Ford County has seen in a long time. Willie goes out of his way to make sure that he gets as much news, information and gossip as he can.

Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

The next edition of Willie's paper led with the story of the Rhoda's rape and murder. It included pictures of Rhoda, as well as photos of Padgitt in handcuffs with blood all over him. Using primarily unnamed sources, Willie recounted the entire story of how the crime happened. He included pictures of the crime scene and Rhoda's house. He had no idea the backlash would be so strong and quick.

The morning the paper came out, Willie was at the Ford County courthouse for the bail hearing. As Willie was sitting waiting for court to convene, Lucien Wilbanks, the defense lawyer, walked over and began yelling and waving a copy of the *Times*. He accused Willie of sensationalism and yellow journalism and threatened to file suit against him. The judge entered the courtroom, and the bail hearing began. Bail would only be granted if the Padgitt family secured Danny's appearance at trial. The family refused. Lucien then announced that he would move for change of venue. He used Willie's paper as his justification, saying it had corrupted the jury pool. All eyes were on Willie, and he was horrified. The judge read through the story and ruled that there was nothing out of line. Willie was relieved.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

The author introduces a new setting, the courtroom in the Ford County courthouse, as well as a new cast of characters. The defense lawyer, Lucien Wilbanks, is introduced as a fiery character that yells and curses at Willie for his story in the paper. The author also introduces Judge Loopus as an impartial hard-nosed judge who has managed to stay off of the Padgitt family's payroll. These characters will be important to the courtroom drama that unfolds in the coming chapters.

Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

Willie describes the *Times* office, which is a very old building that came with his purchase of the paper. As old and cluttered as it was, he loved it. After the bail hearing, Willie returned to his office and discussed the hearing with a member of his staff, Baggy. Baggy assured Willie that they would not get sued. Baggy, who hung around the courthouse with his lawyer buddies, also told Willie that Danny was probably not being treated like a criminal in prison, but living the good life there instead, since his family owned the town's law enforcement. Willie decided to follow that lead and confirmed its truth with the Sheriff. In the paper's next edition, he ran a story about the bail hearing and the good life Danny was leading in prison. His article spurred an outcry from the community on the soft treatment the suspected murderer was getting. After this second edition of his newspaper, Willie was happy to see the subscription number jump to three thousand and his ad revenue double. He and his paper were becoming a force in the community.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

In this chapter, Willie continues his quest to be a hard-driving news reporter. Undaunted by the threats of the defense lawyer, he writes another story about Danny Padgitt, this time telling about the soft treatment he's been getting in prison. This causes widespread community action, and Willie is impressed by the impact of his paper on the townspeople. Willie knows that the town's reaction to his stories will be key to the survival of his paper and his making money. Willie watches as subscription rates and ad revenue increase steadily.

Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

A staff member named Piston discovered a bomb sitting on a pile of papers. The police came and evacuated the entire area around the building. Afterward, Willie found Baggy at the courthouse in the Bar Room, where he frequently drank with the town's lawyers. Baggy said that the Padgitts had planted the bomb to intimidate the newspaper and the town. He was surprised the bomb didn't go off, he said, and took it as a sign they were losing their touch. Later, Willie questioned the Sheriff on how he planned to investigate. The Sheriff told him to back off. That night Wiley Meek, the photographer, was beaten almost to death. This frightened Willie, but he decided to keep going. He bought a gun for himself and continued reporting the story.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

The suspense and action are increased in this chapter when the *Times* office is almost blown up and Willie's photographer gets beaten up. Both incidents are suspected to be the work of the Padgitt family, Willie's only current enemy. Willie decides that he will not buckle under the crime family's intimidation , but he will attack his reporting with more zeal than before.

This chapter characterizes and further develops Willie as a man with a strong will and youthful fearlessness. More than just an outsider now, he has become the young man who is willing to stand up to the ruthless crime family.

Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Even before Willie had taken over the paper, he had heard a story about a black family that lived in the Lowtown section of Ford County. Calia and Esau Ruffin had been married for over forty years and raised eight children. Seven of their children had gone on to earn PhDs. Willie was fascinated with their story and called to schedule an interview. He met Mrs. Ruffin at her immaculate home, with its front porch, white picket fence and flower garden. She had prepared a meal for them to share at a table on the front porch and prayed when they sat down to eat. As the son of anorexic, Willie had never had home cooked meals, and he savored every bite of the amazing meal laid out before him. Callie, as she preferred to be called, had grown everything they ate. Whatever was left in her garden would be fed to the neighborhood. Willie and Callie talked about local politics and the Kassellaw murder. They broached more personal subjects, too. Willie asked why Callie and all her children had Italian names. He also wondered about her errant son, Sam. Callie wasn't ready to open up about that yet.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

The author begins introducing and characterizing another couple central to the book, Calia and Esau Ruffin. They are a black couple that has defied stereotypes and societal pressures to stay married for 40 years, own their own home, and raise seven highly educated children, all while living in the segregated South. By introducing them, the author begins a storyline aside from the murder case. Callie is characterized as having an immaculate, comfortable home with a prolific vegetable garden. According to Willie, she's an amazing cook and a deeply religious woman. He foreshadows in this chapter the importance of his relationship with Callie by saying "Thus began an unusual friendship that opened my eyes to many things, not the least of which was Southern cuisine."

Part 1, Chapter 9

Part 1, Chapter 9 Summary

Willie continued to run hard news stories and pictures on the front page of the paper. The next big one was the story of the bomb in the *Times* office, complete with photos, and a story about Wiley getting beat up by thugs. At lunch that week, Callie called him courageous. Esau joined their lunch and Willie got to meet him for the first time. The next morning, Willie had an unexpected visitor to his office, Harry Rex Vonner. He was a local lawyer who'd come to give Willie a gun to defend himself. Willie had never shot a gun before, so Harry Rex invited him to a goat roast that afternoon. He said he'd teach Willie how to shoot. Willie learned more about local cuisine, including chitlins and roasted goat, as well as moonshine. Willie also learned how to shoot, which amazed him since he'd never even heard live gunfire before.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Analysis

The book's cast of characters continues to be introduced. In this chapter, we meet Harry Rex Vonner, said to be the town most aggressive divorce lawyer. He befriends Willie by offering him a gun to protect himself. We also learn more about the locals when Willie attends the goat roast. He has the opportunity to taste food he's never had before and try moonshine. More importantly, he learns how to shoot. Willie still feels out of place at the gathering, although now everyone tries to include him.

Part 1, Chapter 10

Part 1, Chapter 10 Summary

The defense lawyer for Danny Padgitt filed a motion for change of venue. On the day of the hearing, Willie was in the courtroom, early as usual. The court listened to the testimony of a resident of a nearby town who knew about the murder and already had an opinion about it. Then, to Willie's surprise, the defense called Willie to the stand. He answered questions about the stories he ran on the Kassellaw murder, who his sources were, and why he presented the stories the way he did. After he was dismissed from the stand, Willie returned to his seat, humiliated.

Part 1, Chapter 10 Analysis

Once again, Willie is pitted against the Padgitts by being called to testify during the change of venue hearing. Padgitt's lawyer is making the argument that Danny could not get a fair trial in this county, because of the newspaper. Willie is humiliated by the experience, having to defend the words and placement and pictures for his news stories. Young and inexperienced, Willie is caught off guard and somewhat timid about defending himself against the aggressive defense lawyer. This chapter further illustrates the campaign of intimidation the Padgitt family is attempting during the trial.

Part 1, Chapter 11

Part 1, Chapter 11 Summary

Danny Padgitt's defense team ended up withdrawing their motion for change of venue. Baggy said it was because they knew Padgitt was guilty, and the family would find it easier to buy a jury in Ford County than anywhere else.

Willie went back to Callie and Esau's for lunch. This time, Callie wanted to talk about religion. She asked Willie if he was a Christian. She told him about her church and asked Willie a number of questions about his religious practices. She concluded that she was not sure he was a Christian, and she was concerned about his soul. Willie asked to change the subject. After lunch, they pulled up rocking chairs and Willie continued his interview about her and her family.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Analysis

In this chapter, we learn that the change of venue hearing was just a ploy by the defense, partly to intimidate Willie. The author further characterizes Callie in this chapter, and we learn something new about Willie as well. Callie interviews Willie, before he gets a chance to continue his interview of her. She is a deeply religious person and questions Willie about his religious beliefs. He is Episcopalian, but he doesn't attend church. We also learn that Willie is not really comfortable with discussing religion, because he asks Ms. Callie to change the subject.

Part 1, Chapter 12

Part 1, Chapter 12 Summary

Willie ran his profile of the Ruffin family in the *Times* in spite of several staff members who were uncomfortable with it. They were concerned that the paper might lose popularity. The profile took up half of the front page. Because he had so much material, Willie decided to run the profile as an occasional series. The black community applauded Willie for challenging racial stereotypes, but he simply saw it as a great human-interest story about a great family. Willie also received a letter applauding his courage and the article from the Padgitt defense lawyer, Lucien Wilbanks. Two weeks later, Willie ran the second article in the series. It included this interesting fact, that when their children grew up and left home, Esau instructed them to write one letter per week to their mother. She saved every letter.

Part 1, Chapter 12 Analysis

Willie took a bigger risk than he realized, when he published his article on the Ruffin family. In the segregated South, the only articles about black people were obituaries. The townspeople preferred it that way. After publishing two of these articles, Willie received little reaction and none of it negative. Of course, Padgitt's lawyer is just glad to keep his client off the front page as much as possible.

In this chapter, the author further characterizes the Ruffin family. We learn that they are a very close knit group and that after the children leave home, they are still heavily influenced by their parents.

Part 1, Chapter 13

Part 1, Chapter 13 Summary

The District Attorney in the Kassellaw murder case, Ernie Gaddis, requested that the court enlarge the jury pool. Rumor had it that he made this request so that it would be harder for the Padgitts to taint the jury. His request was granted to increase the pool from 40 to 100. Callie Ruffin received one of the jury summons. She would be the first black juror to serve in Ford County. When Willie had lunch with Callie that week, he asked how she felt about the summons. She had difficulty from a religious standpoint, since judging others was not consistent with her beliefs. She was deeply thoughtful about the subject.

They also discussed the Italian influence on Callie's life. A gorgeous Italian woman named Nicola Rossetti married the largest landowner in Ford County, Mr. Zachary DeJarnette. Callie's grandmother cooked for the DeJarnettes. Because Nicola had come from a family of laborers, she took very good care of her house workers, including Callie. Callie learned Italian, had a private tutor, and was promised a college education. Mr. DeJarnette committed suicide after losing everything in the stock market crash of 1929, so Callie was never able to go to college. However, she had a life-long love for Nicola and her family. That's why she gave her children Italian names.

Part 1, Chapter 13 Analysis

The book's two storylines now converge. Callie will become part of the murder trial jury as the first black juror to serve in Ford County. We learn more about Callie and how she became educated She grew up in a home that practiced equality in education, so it makes sense that she raised her children to believe they could succeed.

Callie foreshadows her later decision on the death penalty, when she discusses with Willie her religious views on judging others. She believes that according to the Bible it is unacceptable to judge another person.

Part 1, Chapter 14

Part 1, Chapter 14 Summary

Jury selection for murder trial began. Willie and many of the townspeople have crowded into the courtroom to watch. Willie and Baggy had front row seats. The potential jurors were led into the courtroom. Willie noticed Callie looking around for him but there were too many people between them. The District Attorney, in his statement, reminded the courtroom that jury tampering is a crime. At the lunch break, Willie joined Baggy and his lawyer cohorts upstairs in the Bar Room for lunch. The prevailing opinion was that the defense would not challenge Callie's appointment to the jury, because it was assumed that blacks were more sympathetic to accused criminals. This opinion was correct, and Callie was chosen as the last juror. Later, Harry Rex said she was chosen because of Willies articles about her.

Part 1, Chapter 14 Analysis

In this chapter, we learn the genesis for the title of the book. Calia Ruffin, the first black women to serve, is chosen as the last juror. The chapter outlines the jury selection and the drama surrounding the proceedings, such as speculation about each juror and whether the sneering Padgitt family has already tried to influence them.

Willie's deep sense of concern for Callie foreshadows that his wonderful stories about her may come back to haunt her.

Part 1, Chapter 15

Part 1, Chapter 15 Summary

On Tuesday morning, the trial began. The District Attorney presented his opening statements. The defense attorney unexpectedly deferred his opening remarks. The first witness was Sheriff Coley. He was on the Padgitt payroll, but was also up for re-election. He described the crime scene and showed photos of Rhoda's corpse. Willie kept his eyes on Callie, who was obviously disturbed by the photos and seemed to be praying. The second witness was Rhoda's sister, Ginger, from Missouri. Following her were two forensic pathologists. Later, Ginger stopped by Willie's office. He had interviewed her over the phone after the murder. Now, she wanted to see her sister's house, and Willie offered to drive her there. They parked out front, and she asked Willie to recount the crime for her. They drove around for a while and ended up at Willie's apartment, where they talked until two in the morning.

Part 1, Chapter 15 Analysis

The trial begins, and Willie tells us about the witnesses that are called to the stand. Willie is concerned about Calia and how her sensitive spirit will react to the horror she will hear during the trial. Willie also gains a love interest, Rhoda's sister, Ginger. She's an attractive divorcee, and Willie begins spending time with her. The first night they spend talking together, he wants to sleep with her, but after all the drama of the day, Ginger is in no mood for that.

Part 1, Chapter 16

Part 1, Chapter 16 Summary

The next day, the prosecution presented the bloody white shirt that Danny was wearing when he was arrested. However, the investigator that presented the testimony was known to be incompetent and was hammered by the defense. At noon, Willie met Ginger and they had lunch together. During the afternoon testimony, the prosecution presented Mr. Deece as his last witness. His testimony was intensely upsetting. Willie saw Ginger wiping tears from her eyes and Calia praying during his testimony.

Then the defense began their presentation, saying what a wonderful man Danny Padgitt was. They claimed that he had an airtight alibi. Their first witness was Lydia Vince, who said she was having an affair with Mr. Padgitt behind her husband's back. Baggy and Willie knew she was lying. On cross-examination, the prosecution showed how doubtful her story was, but Willie worried that now the jury had a source for reasonable doubt.

Willie and Ginger met up again after court adjourned and spent the night together.

Part 1, Chapter 16 Analysis

The suspense of the trial is heightened in this chapter with the presentation of an alibi for Danny Padgitt. The author does a good job of creating courtroom tension and wrote a beautiful cross-examination of the alibi witness. The chapter is written from Willie's point of view, so the reader doesn't know if what the alibi witness is saying is true or not. Willie and others believe she is lying and that the Padgitts hired her to perjure herself.

Part 1, Chapter 17

Part 1, Chapter 17 Summary

After Lydia Vince's testimony, the District Attorney Gaddis and Henry Rex met to lament over her story. They were convinced she was lying and set out to prove it. They knew that Vince's testimony could easily lead to a hung jury, and then Padgitt would go free. They found Mr. Vince, Lydia's estranged husband, and had him subpoenaed to appear in court the next morning. He testified that she had no job, was buying lots of new stuff, and he couldn't understand how she was paying her rent. He also told the court that the reason they were divorcing was that Lydia was a lesbian. Then the defense reluctantly let Danny testify. The District Attorney relished his opportunity to cross-examine Danny and shot holes all through his testimony. As Danny was leaving the witness stand, he pointed at the jurors and threatened to come and get them, if they convicted them.

Part 1, Chapter 17 Analysis

The tension continues to build between the good guys and bad guys. The author does a good job of evening the score between the two sides, so at this point the reader has no idea who will win this courtroom battle. The author also does a good job of creating tension in the courtroom dialogue, especially when Danny is on the witness stand. One almost expects Danny to confess in front of the jury, then and there.

Part 1, Chapter 18

Part 1, Chapter 18 Summary

After a break following Danny Padgitt's outburst, closing arguments began. At the end of the day, the jury was given instructions and released to the jury room to deliberate. Willie returned to his office to wait, and Ginger accompanied him. They sat out on the patio and talked. The verdict was returned in less than an hour, and everyone returned to the courtroom. The judge announced that Danny Padgitt had been found guilty on all counts. The court recessed, and the jurors were told to return the next morning to decide whether Danny would get life in prison or the death penalty. Afterward, Ginger returned to Willie's office, and they decided to drive to Memphis and celebrate. Willie relished the evening, driving with the top down and having this brief, yet memorable affair with Ginger.

Part 1, Chapter 18 Analysis

The courtroom tension culminates in this chapter with a guilty verdict. A sigh of relief is breathed when the horrible criminal is convicted. However, the courtroom drama is not over yet. Just as important is the penalty phase, which is yet to be decided. A death sentence requires a unanimous vote by the jury. Knowing Calia's difficulty with judging another person, we can suspect that there may be trouble getting a death penalty vote. Willie's bias is toward the death penalty, since life in prison really means only ten years behind bars.

Part 1, Chapter 19

Part 1, Chapter 19 Summary

The next day, the jurors had to decide Danny's sentence. Both the defense and prosecution had prepared statements, as well as witnesses who took the stand to either plead for Danny's life or plead for his death. After both sides had their say, the jury was once again dismissed to decide the penalty. After three hours of deliberation, the jury returned to the courtroom. They told the judge they did not have a unanimous opinion and didn't see any further progress. Thus, Danny Padgitt would serve a life sentence for his crime. After the verdict, Willie returned to his office, expecting Ginger to show up. She didn't. Instead, Willie got a call from Esau, Calia's husband. Callie was in the hospital. She had fainted in the parking lot as a result of high blood pressure. Willie spent the evening listening to her kids tell him all about their lives. He wished he had his pen and notepad.

Part 1, Chapter 19 Analysis

The mood of this chapter is much more somber. After Willie finds out that Danny might serve only ten years of a life sentence, he's dismayed. The jury deadlocks, and the judge declares that Danny will serve a life sentence and not receive the death penalty. The proceedings are again written from Willie's point of view, so the reader is left to wonder what happened in the courtroom. When Willie is summoned to the hospital by Calia's family, the reader wants to know what happened on the jury as much as Willie does. However, Callie tells Willie that the jury made a pact never to disclose what happened.

Part 1, Chapter 20

Part 1, Chapter 20 Summary

On the Saturday following the trial, Willie found seven letters slipped under his office door. They were all letters to the editor about the trial. All were outraged that Danny did not receive the death penalty. Six of them blamed Callie's presence on the jury . Willie decided not to print any of the letters that would harm Calia. He went to visit the Ruffins and talked to Callie briefly. She said the verdict was not what she wanted. That's all she would say for many years. During the following days, the town stewed over the verdict. Willie received eighteen letters to the editor, only six of which he printed.

Part 1, Chapter 20 Analysis

As much as Willie thought he had encouraged racial tolerance in his community, he finds out differently when people blame Callie for the verdict. He decides not to print them for her safety. According to Wiley Meek, the town gossip blamed the verdict on Callie, and the Padgitts paid on the jury. Even though the trial is over, the unresolved issues of the death penalty hang over the story, creating suspense and interest in the next part of the book.

Part 2, Chapter 21

Part 2, Chapter 21 Summary

Willie continued to build his newspaper, helped by desegregation. The U.S. Supreme Court ordered the termination of school segregation, and Ford County was up in arms. Willie covered all town meetings, and his newspapers sold very well. Circulation was up to five thousand by late July 1970. Then Willie discovered Friday night high school football. Willie and his staff covered football in the desegregated school system. He was delighted to see white citizens who had been opposed to desegregation cheer for black football players.

A local Hungarian businessman helped Willie overhaul his wardrobe. He began wearing suits in order to look more professional. Although Harry Rex made fun of him, Willie appreciated Mr. Mitlo's help, because he got more attention from women.

Part 2, Chapter 21 Analysis

This chapter shows the town getting back to normal following the murder trial. Then comes the big news of desegregation, which is a hot issue that is cooled by the success of Friday night football. Willie covers all of these stories and makes a lot of money doing it. Willie is no longer so much of an outsider. His change in wardrobe signals his role as an established leader in town.

Part 2, Chapter 22

Part 2, Chapter 22 Summary

Mr. Caudle, the original owner of the *Times* passed away, and Willie felt bad that he had not spoken to Mr. Caudle since he purchased the paper. Malcolm Vince, who testified in the Padgitt trial and ruined Padgitt's alibi, is murdered in a nearby county. Willie is not sure whether to run a story about this murder, because he doesn't want to allow the Padgitts to further terrorize Ford County. However, he decides to uphold his journalistic integrity. He runs the story on page three. The Sheriff said that it was a clean hit, with no clues left behind. He also remarked that he was thankful that he did not serve on the Padgitt trial jury. His comments upset Willie.

Part 2, Chapter 22 Analysis

Willie discusses two deaths in Ford County. One of them is the estranged husband of Danny Padgitt's alleged lover. The prevailing opinion is that the Padgitts had something to do with it. The author creates suspense when the Sheriff says he's glad he wasn't on the jury. Is he foreshadowing trouble for the former jurors?

The previous owner of the paper dies as well. Willie fondly remembers him and devotes much of the paper to articles, obituary and photos of Mr. Caudle. Now that Willie is beginning to feel part of the town, he feels more connection to its history.

Part 2, Chapter 23

Part 2, Chapter 23 Summary

Willie finally got the story about Callie and Esau's youngest son, Sam Ruffin. Years ago, when he was sixteen, Sam took a part time job at the local shoe store. One of his customers, Iris Durant, took a liking to him and seduced him one day while he was working alone at the store. The affair continued. Mrs. Durant's husband became suspicious and hired Harry Rex to investigate her activities. The affair was discovered, and Sam was fired from the shoe store. Mr. Durant wanted him dead. The affair was especially scandalous because Sam was black and Mrs. Durant white. The fact that she was an adult and he a child did not help Sam. He had to leave town on a Greyhound bus in the middle of the night. He had not been back to Ford County since. Sam contacted Willie to say he wanted help coming home. At their next lunch, Willie told Miss Callie that he was going to try and help Sam. Willie met with Sam in Memphis and asked Harry Rex to speak Mr. Durant about forgiving Sam and removing the contract on his life. Harry didn't want to have anything to do with the situation but promised to relay the message.

Part 2, Chapter 23 Analysis

In this chapter, we finally learn about the Ruffin's only son without a PhD. He has been exiled from Clanton since age sixteen. For Willie, the Ruffin family represents something that he never had. He was the only child of an anorexic mother and distant father. For him the Ruffin family has become the family he never had. He boasts that he now has full family privileges and can eat at Miss Callie's table whenever he wants to. He wants to do whatever he can for this new family of his.

Friends and employees, however, have warned Willie to be careful with trying to bring Sam home. These warnings build suspense. The reader wonders if they foreshadow trouble that Willie may find by taking up Sam's cause.

Part 2, Chapter 24

Part 2, Chapter 24 Summary

Willie continued to inquire into the investigation of Malcolm Vince's murder. Not surprisingly, there was nothing new. He and the Tishomingo County Sheriff laughed at how corrupt Sheriff Coley in Ford County had become thanks to the Padgitts.

Harry Rex spoke to Mr. Durant about forgiving Sam Ruffin. The conversation did not go well, as Durant promised to be waiting with a gun if Sam tried to come back to Ford County. Recounting the conversation, Harry Rex once again warned Willie to stay out of the situation. Willie met with Sam and told him about Harry's conversation with Durant.

In the few days before Christmas, the Ruffin children began to gather in Clanton. Willie joined in the festivities and meals. The children thanked Willie for befriending their mother. Late Christmas Eve, Willie drove to Memphis to his father's house, which had not been decorated at Christmas for ten years. Willie had lunch with his grandmother BeeBee on Christmas. The next morning, he hurried back to Clanton.

Part 2, Chapter 24 Analysis

Willie is becoming more settled in Clanton. Rather than rushing away on the weekends, he's rushing back after being away. He is becoming a part of the Ruffin family as well. The foreshadowing in this chapter makes his involvement in the Ruffin family seem more and more dangerous. Others aren't as tolerant of his friendship with a black family. Harry Rex has warned him multiple times now that local people won't like it.

Part 2, Chapter 25

Part 2, Chapter 25 Summary

One cold day, while Willie was working in his office, he heard gunshots. A bullet came through the window near him. He hit the floor as shots continued. The shots seemed random and not close by. Willie scrambled to find his own gun, but then remembered it was probably in his car or apartment. He remembered one of the guys on his staff, Bigmouth Bass, had an arsenal of guns in his office, so Willie wasn't worried. He stayed put. Then he crawled out onto the patio and behind a rocking chair, so he could see what was going on. A sniper was shooting randomly from the top of the courthouse. Wiley crawled out onto the patio with Willie and began taking pictures of the gunman. When the police began shooting back, the sniper fled. The sniper was Hank Hooten, a local lawyer who had been in love with Rhoda Kassellaw. He was upset that Danny Padgitt had not received the death penalty. He was found in the stairwell of the courthouse, totally naked. He was committed to a mental institution and all charges were dropped.

Part 2, Chapter 25 Analysis

In this chapter, a local lawyer loses his mind in dramatic fashion. For a small town, Clanton has a good share of drama. Willie's reaction to the situation was to try to get closer to the action rather than get away from it. Even though shots are being fired around him, he crawls out onto his patio to get a better look at the shooter. For Willie everything that happens is a potentially huge news event, and he takes every opportunity to get right in the middle of the action.

Part 2, Chapter 25 Analysis

After owning the *Times* for just a year, Willie was able to mail a check to his grandmother BeeBee for the $55,000 he'd borrowed, plus interest. A few days later, as he'd hoped, BeeBee sent the check back with a note that said how proud she was of him and that she hoped he'd write to her more often. Willie used the money to buy a new offset press and give the *Times* a new graphic look. The paper was doing very well during the election season of 1971. There were an incredible amount of local candidates and positions to fill. All of the candidates wanted to advertise in Willie's paper, and he was happy to accommodate them.

Willie took Callie out for lunch for the first time. It had taken six months to convince her it was not a waste of money. They ate at Claude's, the best restaurant in town. Callie had a less than positive review of the food. Hers was better. She gave Willie an update on her garden, her kids and her grandkids. Even though she complained, Willie knew she had a good time.

Part 2, Chapter 26 Analysis

In this chapter, we find out that Willie's goal of making lots of money with his paper has come to fruition. He's able to write one check to pay off his grandmother's loan. Circulation is up to 6,000. We also learn that Willie has now been in Ford County for a year. Willie also takes Callie out to a restaurant for lunch. He comments that he's not concerned about being seen in public with a black woman but he's concerned about Mrs. Ruffin being able to fit her large frame into his small convertible. The restaurant they eat in is one frequented predominately by blacks, and no one gives them any looks while they are there. These observations hint that Willie is still aware of prejudice around him in Ford County, Mississippi.

Part 2, Chapter 27

Part 2, Chapter 27 Summary

Willie attended the Clanton Fourth of July festivities, which were mostly a series of political rallies for area politicians. After the Kassellaw murder and sniper rampage, crime was a big issue. It was the summer of 1971, but there was no talk of Vietnam. Willie noted that at least 50,000 soldiers had died so far in Vietnam, and he was surprised that it was never mentioned during the local elections.

The first week of August, the town gathered to vote and to watch the election results come in. In the days leading up to the election, Willie had plenty to report: a fistfight among two candidates outside a church, two lawsuits, and one man arrested for defacing a rival candidate's billboards. The night of the election returns, citizens gathered in the town square with lawn chairs, food and drinks to watch two giant chalkboards show the results. After the evening was over, Willie strolled the streets, feeling proud of his town and glad to be part of a democracy.

Part 2, Chapter 27 Analysis

Willie witnesses Election Day in Ford County for the first time. He found that the residents enjoy it almost as much as Friday night football. Willie is beginning to become a part of and really enjoy the traditions of the town. He was delighted to see the residents gather together in the park to watch election results come in.

Willie also offers an up-date on the town. He is proud of the way the town recovered from the murder trial became a town that resists corruption. It will no longer buckle under the pressure of the Padgitt family. This courage endears the town to him.

Part 2, Chapter 28

Part 2, Chapter 28 Summary

Ford County learned that one of its sons had been killed in Vietnam. Willie was furious at the waste of this young man's life. He walked the streets of Clanton, fuming, until he remembered that he was the editor of a newspaper who could voice his opinions. He was ashamed that up until that point he'd been so silent on the subject of the war. Willie ran his first editorial on the war on the front page, below the fold under a large picture of Pete, the fallen soldier. His editorial asked why the war was still going on in Vietnam, and what we were doing there. After lunch that same day, Bubba Crockett came to visit Willie. He was a Clanton native and had been to Vietnam to fight. He invited Willie to come to poker night. Willie received a few letters, all of which were critical of his article. He planned to run every one of them, although he hoped he would receive one that was in his favor. Willie went to play poker with the guys. They all admired his courage in writing the editorial.

Part 2, Chapter 28 Analysis

Willie is beginning to find his calling within his job. He seeks to make a difference rather than just make money. He is beginning to care about larger issues. Willie is also growing thick skin necessary to withstand letters that are critical of his point of view. He seems to be growing up and his paper is growing up with him.

Part 2, Chapter 29

Part 2, Chapter 29 Summary

Willie published all the letters he received regarding his editorial. Most did not agree with him, but he did receive letters from a group of high school students that agreed with him and did not want to go to war.

Willie's landlord, Max Hocutt died on New Year's Day of 1972. His sisters, who also lived in the house, came to tell Willie and to ask him to go look at Max and make sure he was dead. He did and while in the house they told him that they were moving to Florida and wanted him to buy the home and the Mercedes. The house was a gorgeous dilapidated mess. He was hesitant, but after a couple of days said yes to both the car and the house.

When Willie went to lunch at the Ruffin's that Thursday, he knew something was wrong as soon as he arrived. The family had received a draft notice for Sam. For the next week, Willie deliberated with the family over whether Sam should go. Sam ended up going underground and turned up later in Ontario, Canada.

Part 2, Chapter 29 Analysis

Though Willie is called all sorts of names after printing his editorial, he is quite pleased with the controversy he's created. He is further becoming the mature editor and publisher of the local paper. He is also becoming more and more rooted in little Clanton. He ends up buying his landlord's mansion, with plans to renovate it and make it his permanent home. Just like a member of the Ruffin family, he gets right in the middle of their domestic controversy over whether Sam should obey his draft order or not. In the latter days of the war, it was rumored that the government in Washington had given up on winning the war, yet let it go on, instead of bringing the soldiers home. In the opinion of Willie and many others, tens of thousands of soldiers are needlessly being killed. Willie does not want Sam to become one of those casualties.

Part 2, Chapter 30

Part 2, Chapter 30 Summary

Willie began renovations on his home, after choosing a contractor. The project began in April 1972.

On graduation day that year, a bunch of teenagers were arrested with marijuana in their possession. The town was aghast that its children were involved with drugs. The cops treated them harshly, charging them with every crime possible. Since the cops were now on high alert for drugs, Willie's pot-smoking poker friends had to move their gatherings further out into the woods. That week at poker, talk was of town gossip, rather than the bombings of Hanoi.

That week, Willie ran the story that the State Supreme Court upheld Danny Padgitt's conviction. He hoped never to hear Padgitt's name again.

Part 2, Chapter 30 Analysis

Although Clanton is small and far removed from the mainstream, they still can't escape the drug culture of the late 1960s and early 70s. Many of the townspeople don't know that the Padgitts produce much of the area's pot. The supplier is in their own back yard.

The Padgitt conviction is on the front page of Willie's paper once again. This time the case has gone to the State Supreme Court. The town is relieved that the conviction has not been overturned. Willie knows that another trial would have been good for selling newspapers, but he's glad that the conviction was not overturned.

Part 3, Chapter 31

Part 3, Chapter 31 Summary

After five years of renovation work, Willie's house was complete. He was financially broke from the whole affair, but happy with the results. He decided to have a party to show off the new house. He invited three hundred people to his party. That many and more showed up. All of his friends, including Harry Rex, Bubba Crockett, and Mr. Mitlo, along with his grandma BeeBee and her friends, attended. It was called the best party Clanton had seen in twenty years.

Darla, the court reporter in the Padgitt trial, drove five hours to give Willie a news tip. She had seen Danny Padgitt strolling down the street with a friend and eating lunch in a diner in her hometown, Broomfield. Danny had moved to a work release "ranch" that was supposed to be for non-violent criminals. Willie and Wiley investigated, took some pictures and ran the story on the front page "No Prison for Padgitt - He's Off At Camp." Memphis and Jackson newspapers picked up the story, politicians got involved, and Danny ended up back at the penitentiary. Willie started receiving death threats.

Part 3, Chapter 31 Analysis

In Part 3, we rejoin Willie five years later. He is still living in Clanton, and his renovated Victorian home has just been completed. Willie hosts the town's biggest party in 20 years. He has become a prominent and popular figure in town.

Danny Padgitt re-emerges in the story when Willie learns that Padgitt has been moved to a luxurious work release ranch. Still full of youthful courage, Willie investigates the story and exposes Danny's favorable arrangement. Following the story, Willie begins receiving death threats. He begins carrying his gun again, but is not too concerned.

Part 3, Chapter 32

Part 3, Chapter 32 Summary

Willie became less concerned with the Padgitt's death threats as the family became more isolated and got involved in some legitimate enterprises.

The whole town knew that Willie did not attend church. He had a plan to change that. He decided to research the churches in town, all eighty-eight of them, by attending at least one service at each of them. He found that there were no Catholic, Episcopalian or Mormon churches, but plenty of Baptists and Pentecostals. It was 1974 when he began his assignment. He would attend a church on Sunday and write a short article on the experience for that week's newspaper. The column was widely popular.

Part 3, Chapter 32 Analysis

The one aspect of small-town Southern life that Willie has avoided is church attendance. There were so few "unchurched" people in Clanton that they were all known by name. Willie decides he should explore this aspect of his town, without prejudice. He goes to every church and writes a nice article about each one. Just as interesting as attending the churches, he found, was to hear what the churches believed about each other. For example, the snake-handling church was rumored to dislike visitors and bring out the snakes only at night. . Willie therefore attended their Sunday night service, where he was welcomed, but didn't happen to see any snakes.

Part 3, Chapter 33

Part 3, Chapter 33 Summary

One midnight in 1978, Willie received a call from a fellow reporter in Memphis who asked if he was covering the Danny Padgitt parole hearing. Willie had no idea the hearing was scheduled. Apparently, Padgitt's two consecutive life sentences had been changed to concurrent, and he was now eligible for parole. Willie attended the hearing. When he arrived, the chairman of the Parole Board asked him what he was doing there. Willie argued with the Board for his right to be there. They finally compromised, and he was able to stay as a witness for the "other side," but not to report on the proceedings. As the only witness, Willie had the opportunity to argue against parole being granted. At the conclusion of the proceedings, the Board voted against release and Danny went back to prison.

Part 3, Chapter 33 Analysis

Again, the Padgitt case re-emerges. He is eligible for parole, and this angers Willie. He attends the Parole Board meeting and ends up acting as a representative for the prosecution. Unfortunately, Judge Loopus has passed away, and the District Attorney has retired, so there was no one else to speak on behalf of Rhoda's memory. Willie once again goes head to head with the Padgitt family and wins the battle. They do not intimidate him at all.

Part 3, Chapter 34

Part 3, Chapter 34 Summary

Willie prints the story of the Padgitt parole hearing on the front page of the newspaper and sends it to all the officials present at the hearing. In return, he received a threatening letter from the attorney for the Parole Board. Harry Rex assured Willie that the Parole Board attorney couldn't touch him.

At lunch with Miss Callie, Willie learned that she was going on a diet to improve her health. Lunch was low fat, but tasted just as good. Willie shared two letters from Sam with her. He was now attending college in Canada. Callie continued to express concern for Willie's eternal soul.

Willie was still attending churches for his newspaper series. After church one Sunday, he spotted a young man from the Padgitt jury. They talked for a while; he was very concerned about whether Padgitt would be released.

Part 3, Chapter 34 Analysis

Willie takes a great risk with his safety again and prints the Padgitt parole-hearing story on the front page of his newspaper. He doesn't worry about his safety overmuch, but he's hired a part-time bodyguard. His life continues as normal, with its lunches at Miss Callie's and a new church every Sunday.

When he sees a former Padgitt jury member, it becomes clear that the young man and his parents are still re-living the events and are very concerned that Padgitt will get out of jail. They beg Willie to let them know when he gets out. Their extreme concern foreshadows future events in the book.

Part 3, Chapter 35

Part 3, Chapter 35 Summary

In 1978, the town of Clanton learned it would be the next site for a "big box" Bargain City store. Most of the townspeople were happy, but when the neighbors protested a public hearing was held. Willie spoke at the hearing about other towns where Bargain City stores had gone in. Their downtowns and small businesses went out of business. He was in the minority, however, and the city council voted unanimously to approve the store. Willie wrote editorials in protest, but accepted the ad revenue from the store. Not long after the store opened, small downtown stores began to close down, just as he predicted.

One day in March of 1979, the representative of a larger publisher visited Willie. They wanted to buy his paper. After checking him out, Willie opened his financial books. His paper was valued at $1.2 million. Willie couldn't believe it. Two weeks later, he turned down the offer from the larger publisher.

Part 3, Chapter 35 Analysis

Clanton is not immune to urban sprawl as a big bargain store plans to move in. Wanting to preserve the town as it is, Willie speaks out at a public hearing and writes editorials in his paper. His arguments fall on deaf ears, and Harry Rex tells him to stop preaching. The big store is approved and opens by Christmas. Willie reports the story, but not on the front page. The offer of a buyout may foreshadow a conclusion to the story.

Part 3, Chapter 36

Part 3, Chapter 36 Summary

Another year passed and Danny Padgitt was up for parole again. Willie has been banned from the proceedings, but planned to attend anyway. He wanted to take with him a mob of people that would be opposed to Danny's parole, but he found that the town feared trouble with the Padgitts. Baggy and the Sheriff were the only others to attend. Danny's parole was approved. The town was disappointed, but not outraged. Almost a decade had passed, and the townspeople's anger had mellowed, if not disappeared. Not long after Danny's release, Baggy tells Willie that Padgitt's release was bought from State Senator Theo Morton. Willie was shocked.

The gentlemen who want to buy the *Times* from Willie reappeared. They said that, after taxes, he'd walk away with a million dollars. Willie declined the offer again. When he arrived at Miss Callie's that week, Sam Ruffin was visiting. Willie was shocked and pleased. Sam had a college degree and was planning to attend law school next. He told Willie that his mother was worried, since Padgitt was out of prison.

Part 3, Chapter 36 Analysis

It seems that Clanton is away from Willie. He is still interested in fighting the good fight against the Padgitts and Danny's parole, but few others are interested. The town has moved on from that episode. As time passes, passions mellow. This is true in the case of Sam Ruffin, too. He shows up at Miss Callie's and Willie is surprised to see him there for lunch. Change is afoot in the newspaper business, too, but Willie is resisting.

Part 3, Chapter 37

Part 3, Chapter 37 Summary

Lenny Fargarson, the young man from the Kassellaw murder trial jury, is shot while sitting in his wheelchair on his porch reading. Everyone blames Danny Padgitt, since he promised revenge on all the jurors. Willie helped the Sheriff by retrieving a list of the jurors and warned Miss Callie. The Sheriff asks Willie and Harry Rex to speak to Lucien Wilbanks, Danny Padgitt's attorney, about bringing Danny in for questioning. Wilbanks refuses to produce Padgitt, since there's no warrant and no evidence against him. Willie returned to Miss Callie's, where her family and neighborhood were on watch with guns, in case anyone tried to harm her. The whole town was full of tension and fear.

Part 3, Chapter 37 Analysis

The suspense is heightened again when a gunman kills one of the Padgitt trial jurors. Willie fears for Callie's safety. Rather than just being a reporter, Willie has taken on an active role in the investigation and assists the Sheriff in locating and notifying the other jurors. This kind of killing was foreshadowed earlier in the story when Danny Padgitt vowed to punish all the jurors during his trial. Now that he's out on parole, he's the obvious suspect.

Part 3, Chapter 38

Part 3, Chapter 38 Summary

Miss Callie insisted on going to Lenny Fargarson's funeral, even though her husband, children and Willie were against it. Nevertheless, they got her there early and made sure she was heavily guarded.

While working on a tractor, Mo Teale is shot dead by a rifle. The shell found by the police matches the one found at the scene of Lenny's murder, but no other clues were found. After doing all he could at the murder scene, Willie returned to his office to write the story. Harry Rex came by to take Willie on a drive past the homes of the remaining jurors. They were all heavily guarded by armed friends, family and neighbors. Willie confided that he was thinking of selling the paper. Harry's response was that Willie should do that and take a much-needed vacation. Willie makes it clear that he doesn't plan to move away, and that Clanton is his home.

Part 3, Chapter 38 Analysis

The tension and suspense of the story continues when another juror is killed, and the shell casing matches the one in Lenny's killing. No other evidence is found. The reader has no clues as to who the killer could be, although the townspeople agree that it must be Danny Padgitt, taking revenge.

Part 3, Chapter 39

Part 3, Chapter 39 Summary

The story of the murdered jurors attracted the attention of the Memphis and Jackson newspapers, and they sent reporters to Clanton. As Willie sat and talked with them, he thought how strange it was that they were working for big papers, making about $40,000 a year, while he worked for a small paper and could walk away with a million dollars.

Willie was summoned to Miss Callie's house. She told him that the two murdered jurors have something in common; they voted against the death penalty. The third juror who voted against the death penalty was Maxine Root. Willie found Harry Rex and discussed the new information with him. He also talked to the Sheriff about whether this was a pattern or a coincidence.

Part 3, Chapter 39 Analysis

The suspense of the shootings continues, although we are provided with more clues in this chapter. Willie finds out that there may be a pattern to the two killings, because the two victims voted against the death penalty. This information challenges assumptions. It would make no sense for Padgitt to kill those that voted to save his life.

Willie also continues to consider selling the *Times*. Harry Rex is encouraging him, and Willie dreams more and more often about getting away.

Part 3, Chapter 40

Part 3, Chapter 40 Summary

The town was still on edge when Mo Teale's funeral took place. Willie decided not to attend and spend the time writing Mo's obituary. Lucien Wilbanks requested a meeting with the Sheriff through Harry Rex. He also requested that Willie not be a part of the meeting. Wilbanks told the Sheriff that Danny was not responsible for the killings, that he had alibis, and multiple people would vouch for Danny's whereabouts at the time of each of the killings. The Sheriff was skeptical and warned Wilbanks that if another person got shot, the entire town would explode in violence toward the Padgitts. The town almost erupted when two teenagers set off a bunch of fireworks on the front porch of one of the juror's homes.

Part 3, Chapter 40 Analysis

No more shootings have occurred, but the town remains jumpy and suspicious. In a meeting with the Sheriff, Danny Padgitt's lawyer tells him that Danny is not involved in the shootings, but the Sheriff is skeptical due to Danny's prior record.

Part 3, Chapter 41

Part 3, Chapter 41 Summary

As Willie continued to consider selling the newspaper, he thought back over the last nine years and realized that he had not left for more than four days. He believed the paper's success was due to the fact that he wrote a great deal about a town in which not much happened. He had also written human interest stories and the series on the churches. Now he was tired of writing and tired of Clanton. He didn't appreciate the way the town was changing and developing. He thought the town was most likely tired of him, too. He had begun spending more and more time writing editorials, arguing his causes. He promised to make his decision in twenty-three days.

Willie took Miss Callie, Esau and Sam to Memphis for a day of shopping and Italian food. They also visited Nicola Rossetti DeJarnette's grave. All four enjoyed escaping the tension and fear in Clanton for a while.

Part 3, Chapter 41 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader learns more about Willie and his devotion to the newspaper. For nine years, he didn't take a vacation and tirelessly endured being on a deadline all the time. He also thinks about how he and the town are growing in different directions. This book has become less of a courtroom drama and murder mystery, and more of a coming of age story that follows Willie as he grows up in Clanton.

Part 3, Chapter 42

Part 3, Chapter 42 Summary

On June 25, 1979, Willie sold the *Times* and left the lawyer's office with a check for $1.5 million. He felt sad as he thought about all he was giving up. He and the paper had grown up together. He had transformed the paper into a wildly prosperous business. He returned to the office and told his staff the news. Then he and Harry Rex celebrated over margaritas.

The Ruffin family planned an impromptu reunion, and Willie felt lucky to be able to host most of them in his large home. He was happy to have activity in his large, lonely house. One night, while having dinner, Willie and his guests heard sirens. Maxine Root had received an unexpected package. After deliberating whether to open it, the trooper that was stationed to watch her decided to shoot it. The huge explosion blew shrapnel everywhere and injured Maxine, the trooper and a couple of neighbors. A warrant was issued for Danny Padgitt's arrest, and he was arrested without incident.

Part 3, Chapter 42 Analysis

The author has all but ended the story with the sale of the newspaper and the arrest of Danny Padgitt. Willie is happy to be a millionaire, but sad that he will be leaving the newspaper. He is also excited at the prospect of a new life of travel and adventure. Willie is proud of his accomplishments.

The suspense over the killing of the jurors continues as another murder is attempted. It was established earlier in the book that bombing is a regular tactic used by the Padgitt family. This storyline is not resolved and certainly not over.

Part 3, Chapter 43

Part 3, Chapter 43 Summary

First thing the next morning was Danny's bail hearing. In a scene reminiscent of nine years ago, Danny appeared before the court. Miss Callie insisted on being at the hearing. Willie found himself surprisingly detached from the whole scene. As soon as the judge began to speak, two shots rang out. Everyone in the courtroom got on the floor. Danny Padgitt had been shot twice, once in the head, once in the chest. He was dead. After a couple of minutes, the shooting continued outside. All of the windows in Lucien Wilbanks' office were shot out. Then the sniper turned the gun on himself. When the police were able to access the cupola of the courthouse, they found Hank Hooten, naked again and this time dead. Willie left town to visit the mental hospital that was supposed to be treating Hank. When he phoned back to Clanton, he was told that Miss Callie was in the hospital. She'd had a stroke.

Part 3, Chapter 43 Analysis

The author uses an interesting plot twist to resolve the story of Danny Padgitt. With Danny dead, jurors will no longer live in fear. Danny gets the death sentence most people felt he deserved nine years ago. The story resolution is brought on by a mentally ill lawyer who assisted in the prosecution of Danny and was Rhoda's lover at the time of her murder. This twist was foreshadowed earlier in the book, when Hooten was shooting up the town from the roof of the courthouse. The author does a fine job of completely resolving the Danny Padgitt storyline.

Part 3, Chapter 44

Part 3, Chapter 44 Summary

Willie arrived at the hospital to find that Miss Callie had a stroke and mild heart attack. After a long night at the hospital, Willie and much of the family returned to his home. He was glad to have others in the house with him. The next day, as Willie packed up his office, he got a call to come back to the hospital. Callie was awake and accepting visitors. Willie rushed to her bedside. Hewanted to tell her he'd sold the paper, but she was too weak to communicate. The bedside vigil continued for several days. Then Callie had a massive heart attack. When the family was summoned for their final moments with her, Willie was ushered in as part of her family. When Calia passed away, Willie was devastated. He'd dreamed of bringing her treasures from around the world. He went to his office to have some quiet time to himself and write his last obituary.

Part 3, Chapter 44 Analysis

The story ends sadly, with Callie's death. Her death makes a very unexpected and unhappy ending to the book. Callie's death shocks the reader as much as it shocks Willie. The ending brings a more somber tone of realism to the book. Death is a part of life, however, and the story that began with the start of Willie's career comes full circle as Willie writes his last obituary.

Characters

Willie Traynor

Willie grew up in Memphis, Tennessee as Joyner William Traynor. His mother died from anorexia when he was young. Supported by his wealthy and generous grandmother BeeBee, he went to journalism school at Syracuse. While in college, he dreamed of working for a major national newspaper and writing exposes that would uncover corruption and make a major impact on his world. Then Willie learned from a friend and fellow journalism student that the big money was in owning a local hometown newspaper. After college, he went to work for *The Ford County Times*, which he bought soon after with a loan from BeeBee. The book is about Willie's coming of age after he buys the newspaper. When he arrived in Clanton, Mississippi, he didn't know anything about publishing or editing a newspaper, and he knew little about being a reporter. Just as he grew in experience, the paper grew in profitability. Willie is characterized as a progressive young man who believed in racial equality and disapproved of the war in Vietnam. His character is courageous in his reporting and investigating. As a result of his stories about Calia Ruffin, he promoted racial tolerance in his town. Willie did not buckle to the intimidation and threats of those that didn't agree with his reporting. By the end of the book, Willie had become an influential member of his town, a man who didn't hesitate to write what he believed.

Calia Ruffin

Calia was born into the segregated South in Clanton, Mississippi. Her mother worked in the kitchen of a wealthy couple who were the largest land owners in Ford County, Mississippi at the time. The lady of the house was the daughter of an Italian family of laborers. Because this woman believed in treating everyone in her home equally, Calia was educated by private tutors and taught to speak Italian. Calia carried this heritage with her and as a woman was well-spoken, well-read and valued education for her children. She and her husband, Esau, raised eight children, seven of which went on to earn their PhDs. Calia became an adopted mother of sorts for Willie Traynor. He had grown up with a mother that was ill and then passed away. Calia introduced him to the food and family that he'd never had growing up. The Ruffin family was very close knit, yet Willie was welcomed in as one of their own. Calia's support and encouragement helped Willie become a more successful publisher and editor.

Harry Rex Vonner

Harry Rex, the town's most aggressive divorce lawyer, was Willie's father figure in this story. Willie's biological father was a distant man that lived in Memphis and kept to himself. Harry Rex is introduced in the book when he barges into Willie's office and throws a gun on his desk. He thought Willie should have some protection. Harry Rex

became Willie's confidante from that point on. Willie didn't know how to shoot, so Harry Rex taught him how to shoot. He invited Willie to his weekly goat roasts, so that Willie could meet people and get to know the town's traditions, food and drink. When Willie needed to be defended, Harry Rex was there to defend him. When Willie needed to find his way through a maze of small town secrets, Harry Rex was there to help. Harry was an aggressive lawyer who had the respect of most in town. He had always lived there and knew just about everything about its history, its gossip and its people.

Danny Padgitt

Danny Padgitt was born and raised in Ford County as a member of the notorious Padgitt crime family. During Prohibition, the family manufactured and sold their famous whiskey, which began a cycle of criminal activity. The family was rumored over the years to have on its payroll the Sheriff and many other influential members of law enforcement and the judicial system. As a result, a Padgitt had never been convicted of a crime until Danny. Danny was a violent, heavy-drinking young man. He met his victim at a club several hours away from Clanton. She resisted his advances, and he became murderously violent. Danny proved during his trial to be a pathological liar, unpredictable and disrespectful. He threatened the lives of the jurors in open court and weaved a web of lies during his testimony on the witness stand. He was able to buy his way out of the penitentiary to serve in a work release program and then buy off a politician in order to get his parole. Danny lived by violence, and he also died by violence when his victim's lover shot him twice. His character as a bad guy had no sympathetic qualities.

Objects/Places

The Times office

The offices of Willie's newspaper were in an old downtown building that came with the purchase of the paper. The offices had probably never been cleaned out. The building held a great deal of the town's history. Willie loved his office and spent most of his time there. There, he didn't feel lonely or bored.

Willie's Home

After his landlord's death, Willie bought his home, an early twentieth century Victorian mansion. He renovated the entire home, but as beautiful as it was, it was a lonely place for Willie. He loved it when Calia's family came to stay with him and filled the home with family.

The Courthouse

The Ford County courthouse was located at the center of town. It was also a central location in this story, since it was where most of the drama of the Danny Padgitt trial took place. The courthouse was the hideout for the first sniper shootings. It was also the scene of Danny Padgitt's and his killer's deaths.

Calia Ruffin's porch

On Calia Ruffin's porch, Willie became acquainted with Southern cuisine and made a dear friend in Calia. Calia's home was immaculate, rich with flowers and greenery everywhere and a lively garden in the back. Willie became a part of the Ruffin family on that porch, which represented a gathering place for the family.

Themes

Coming of Age

The Last Juror is a story about Willie Traynor and his newspaper growing up and coming of age together. When Willie buys the paper, he had only worked at the *Times* for the two months before it went bankrupt. He had to learn how to be a journalist, publisher and editor all at the same time. He also had to learn how to make the paper a profitable enterprise. Willie didn't really fit in to his surroundings; he wasn't from Ford County as most people in town were. He was from the North, educated, and unmarried at the age of 20. He had little in common with the townspeople, and he had a find a way to relate to them in order to write stories and sell newspapers. He had the idea to begin a series of human interest stories, the first one being about Calia Ruffin. Willie gained a thicker skin during the Danny Padgitt trial, when he had to endure threats, a bomb in his office and intimidation because of his reporting. He didn't relent in reporting stories and began writing editorials. He wrote about social issues such as the Vietnam War and racial tolerance. As he matured, he did not shy away from using his paper to make his opinions known through his editorials. When he eventually sold the newspaper, Willie had become a mature, well-dressed, influential, and wealthy man. Through all of his experiences, he had also become a brave, inquisitive man who cared deeply about the Ruffin family. He was also somewhat lonely and ready to settle down with a family of his own. The *Times* came of age as well, becoming a profitable, respected, widely-read newspaper.

Making a Difference

As a journalism student, Willie had great dreams of making a difference in his world by being a star reporter for a major national news publication. When he found out there was money to be had in the small-town newspaper business, he followed the dollar signs and went to work for *The Ford County Times*. Even though many of the stories he wrote were general news, he was able to make a difference in his community by some of the work that he did. He promoted racial tolerance in word and deed. By writing a profile of the Ruffin family, he helped break down stereotypes. Additionally, he encouraged a community discussion on the Vietnam War and the death penalty. Willie's story demonstrates that one can make a big difference in the world, even if it appears to be in a small way.

Importance of Family

Through his relationship with Calia and the Ruffin family, Willie learned the importance of family. As an only child of an anorexic mother, Willie never sat down to dinner with his family, so sitting down to lunch or dinner with Calia and her family was very meaningful to Willie. He valued his lunches and conversations with Calia. She became like a

mother to him and one of his best friends. She was concerned with the health of both his body and his soul. Willie was mesmerized by the care the Ruffins had for him and for each other. He wanted badly to be a part of their family and experience the kind of family life they knew. The family welcomed him with open arms. Since Willie did not really have a family of his own, he created one for himself with the Ruffins, Harry Rex, his staff and the townspeople as an extended family. He went to their funerals, saw their kids score touchdowns, celebrated with them and intervened on their behalf. The importance of family became an integral part of Willie's character as the book went on. In the beginning, he felt he didn't fit in to his community and had no friends, but at the end of the book, he had become an important part of the community and planned to make Clanton his permanent home.

Southern Life

Although Willie Traynor is from Memphis, Tennessee, the people of Mississippi see him as a northerner. Through Willie, Grisham offers a glimpse of Southern life that is both affectionate and critical. On the positive side, Willie praises Southerners for being warm, gracious, and polite. Grisham provides many examples in the book of folks protecting their neighbors, as well as Willie. For example, Harry Rex Vonner brings him a gun and teaches him how to shoot it because he knows just how dangerous the Padgitt family is. Willie also notes that people in Clanton frequently ask about his health and invite him to church. Religion comes across as an important and integral part of Southern life. Willie notices that many Southerners will rush to help other people but are distrustful of outsiders. Willie notes that "they don't really trust you unless they trusted your grandfather."

Of course, racism is the biggest flaw Willie sees in Mississippi society. Another flaw is the corrupt political system that allows families like the Padgitts to flourish and institutions like segregation to be upheld. As editor, Willie attacks corruption and tries to be a force for positive change in Ford County.

Racism

One of the book's major themes is the racism of the South. At one point, Willie observes that it is not uncommon to see signs reading, "Still Fighting the War," meaning that for many, the Civil War has not truly ended. There are desegregation battles, and the white parents' fear of their children attending school with blacks. Grisham also includes Miss Callie and Esau's story of trying to register to vote, and portrays the ways in which blacks are routinely persecuted in the community.

As editor of the paper, Willie tries to change things as much as possible. When he features the Ruffin family on his front page, he is not thinking in terms of a "colored" story, but in terms of a good human interest story. In his personal life, Willie strives for integration as well. He says he wants his housewarming party to be the first integrated party in Clanton.

Social Classes

When Willie Traynor moves to Clanton, Mississippi, he learns the difference between "family money" and "wealth." A number of Clanton residents are treated with the respect usually given the wealthy, even though they show no signs of being financially well-off. Spot Caudle is eccentric, as are the Hocutts, but because they have family money they are treated with respect and allowed their eccentricities. Willie realizes family money has nothing to do with wealth. In fact, most of the people with family money in Clanton are poor. However, they come from white families and are usually descended from former plantation owners. Their families own big houses with porches, and they are raised from birth with the notion that they are privileged people. As Willie says, "Acreage and trust funds helped somewhat, but Mississippi was full of insolvent blue bloods who inherited the status of family money. It could not be earned. It had to be handed down at birth."

Grisham is not the first Mississippi writer to write about family money. William Faulkner's novels and short stories, set in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, are full of destitute characters who enjoy prestige because of family money.

Religion

While *The Last Juror* could not be characterized as a religious book, the Ruffin family is a very religious family. Miss Callie's belief permeates everything she does, and because she is such a central character in the book, religion takes on an important role. According to her children, Miss Callie's faith in God is one of the reasons they have all achieved so much. Faith in God and in His rules about hatred and judging prevent Miss Callie from becoming bitter over the hatred and racism she has had to face.

The Ruffins are not the only characters in the book who are faithful Christians. Margaret Wright and Lenny Fargarson are both described as religious people, and both gain a large measure of peace and comfort because of it.

Willie is questioned about his faith by Miss Callie. She worries about the state of his soul, as does Margaret. In addition, people in Ford County are taken aback that Willie does not attend a church. He calls himself "the most famous derelict in town." It seems that in the South during this time, one must attend church so as not to be seen as a suspicious character in the eyes of the neighbors. Willie decides to visit every church in Ford County and write about it on the Religion page of the newspaper. He notes that there are no Catholics, Episcopalians, or Mormons in the county, but that it is heavily Baptist with the Pentecostals in second place. Both of these religious communities are quite fractured, however. Willie was raised Episcopalian, so visiting churches with long, emotional services is foreign to him. Willie is a religious outsider in Clanton, and through his experiences and observations Grisham illustrates the complexity and contradiction in the community's religious life.

Style

Point of View

The Last Juror is told primarily from first person point of view of the main character, Willie Traynor, except for one notable chapter. The chapter that tells the story of the rape and murder of Rhoda Kassellaw is told from the third person omniscient point of view. Because it was important to the story for the reader to know, without bias, what really happened to Rhoda Kassellaw, the author told this part of the story from the third person, without the filter of any character's point of view.

First person point of view is the most widely used in modern literature. First person is appropriate in telling this story because it is about the coming of age of Willie Traynor, and he is the best one to tell the story. First person point of view allows the author to present an intimate portrait of himself and his story.. In this book, the author used first person to create suspense and tension, because the reader only knows what the main character knows. For example, during the murder trial of Danny Padgitt, when the jurors went into the deliberation room, the reader was not privy to the discussions, because Willie was not a part of the jury deliberations. This created a sense of suspense and surprise.

Setting

The Last Juror was set in rural, Ford County, Mississippi in a town called Clanton. Most of the story took place between 1970 and 1980. During this time in the South, many social issues were prevalent, not the least of which was the Civil Rights movement. The Civil Rights movement was in full swing during the time of this book, as was the desegregation of the schools. Even though Clanton was a relatively peaceful town, they had white neighborhoods and a black neighborhood called Lowtown. Blacks and whites primarily kept separate, each having their own restaurants, stores and churches. This book was also set during the last years of the Vietnam War. Clanton was not a sight for public protests of the war, although the main character, Willie Traynor was opposed to the war and used his editorials to protest the war. The war seldom touched little Clanton, but one of its sons was killed in combat and another drafted.

Language and Meaning

The language used in *The Last Juror* is easy to read and somewhat indicative of the time period in which it was set. The author attempts successfully to use the language of the South during the 1970s. For example, his character considers whether to call the African-American population black, colored, or Negro. Since most of the book is told from the point of view of Willie Traynor, a twenty-something college grad, the language

is somewhat youthful. It is as if the reader was reading Willie's journals of 1970-1980.

Structure

The Last Juror is separated into three parts with a total of forty-four chapters. Part 1 includes chapters one through 20 and follows Willie's arrival in Clanton, purchase of the paper, the Rhoda Kassellaw rape and murder and trial, conviction and sentencing of Danny Padgitt. Part 2 includes chapters 21 through 30 and follows life in Clanton following the Padgitt trial, including school desegregation and losing one of its sons in the Vietnam War. In Part 2, Willie buys his house from his landlords, and at the end of Part 2, he has hired contractors to begin total renovation of the home. Part 3 includes chapters 31 through 44 and opens just over five years later with the completion of the renovation of Willie's home. This section includes the paroling of Danny Padgitt and the subsequent killing of three jurors, Danny's killing at the hands of a sniper, Willie's sale of the newspaper and Calia's death.

Double Narrative

In literature, plot means the pattern of events in a story. Usually, a novel has a main plot and perhaps one or two sub-plots. But *The Last Juror* seems to have two plots that inter-twine with one another. The first plot is the Rhoda Kassellaw murder, which includes all the materials about Danny Padgitt's trial. The other plot is the Willie-Miss Callie plot, and the slow building of their friendship. Of course, Miss Callie appears in both plots since she is a juror on the Padgitt case. But often Willie seems to be telling two different stories, and readers must be careful to keep the threads of the plots straight. Sometimes the story feels a little disjointed, yet Willie is recounting the events thirty years after they happened. This nonlinear style seems appropriate because it reflects how a person's memories work.

In other places in the novel, Willie's narrative is unrelated to either the Padgitt case or Miss Callie. These episodes fill out his memory of the time, provide a fuller picture of life in Clanton, and offer insight into Willie's character.

Episodic Plot

An episodic plot is arranged as a series of separate episodes. This allows the writer to shift the place, time and viewpoint of the narrative. One thing that might confuse readers of *The Last Juror* is the sheer number of characters. The story covers nine years and, in that time, dozens of characters float in and out of the story. Because of the episodic nature of the writing, a character may show up only once and never reappear in the narrative. However, the writing is so vivid that even characters who appear only briefly seem to belong in the story. For example, the story of Mr. DeJarnette's suicide gives color to the novel, but moves nothing along in terms of plot. However, these minor

characters help readers understand both Clanton and Ford County. In many ways, Clanton is as much a character in the novel as any other.

Historical Context

Desegregation

In the 1954 decision *Brown v. the Board of Education*, the United States Supreme Court struck down the idea of "separate but equal" that had been the country's guideline for racial equality since the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The *Brown* decision meant that black children must be granted access to the same schools and facilities as their white peers. However, many places in the deeply segregated South did not intend to desegregate without a fight. In some cases, the National Guard was sent in to protect black students as they entered formerly "white only" schools.

Many states fought desegregation through the courts. Mississippi avoided desegregation for a decade in this way. Not until the successful court cases of a number of black families in Mississippi, supported by the NAACP, did schools slowly start to integrate. Schools usually adopted a "freedom of choice" rule, whereby black students could voluntarily choose to go to white schools. Many white citizens fought desegregation with intimidation and violence. Black parents who sent their children to white-dominated schools could lose their jobs, leases, or credit at the bank. Sometimes there was violence, or a burning cross was erected on a family's lawn. In *The Last Juror*, Sam Ruffin becomes the only black student in the formerly all-white middle school. He is beaten regularly until he learns to use his fists and fight back. No other black families in Clanton are willing to put their children in the same situation.

Mississippi continued to fight desegregation until the Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision in *Alexander v. Holmes* in 1969. In the case, which involved thirty Mississippi school districts, the court struck down all types of dual-school districts and ordered that desegregation must happen immediately. Many schools in Mississippi actually made the changes mid-school year, but in *The Last Juror*, the school district desegregates at the beginning of a new school year.

Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was one of the most divisive events in U.S. history in the 1960s–1970s, and to understand why, one must go back much earlier. Vietnam, then called French Indochina, was a French colony for nearly a century before the Second World War. During the peace talks after that war, Vietnam was divided into two halves, communist (North Vietnam) and non-communist (South Vietnam). The French wanted to hold on to their colony, and for over seven years there was a war between the French and the Vietnamese. The United States gave financial help to the French in order to stop the spread of communism. During peace conferences in 1954, it was decided that the French would give up its claim to Indochina, and Vietnam would be temporarily divided. Ho Chi Minh, President of North Vietnam, promised to reunite the country under

a communist banner. Guerrilla fighters called the Vietcong were sent into the south to disrupt the country's attempts at postwar reconstruction.

The United States aided South Vietnam because of its strong stand against communism. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy began sending U.S. troops to Vietnam to act as advisors. Things changed in 1964, when two U.S. ships were bombed in the Gulf of Tonkin. President Lyndon B. Johnson retaliated by bombing North Vietnam outposts. Congress also passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which gave the president broad powers for waging a war in Vietnam. After that, U.S. troops were sent to Vietnam and the United States started bombing North Vietnamese targets.

At first, many Americans supported the war, which was seen as a war against communist aggressors. However, this changed in 1968. U.S. troops had fought in Vietnam for over three years by then, with little to show for it. In January of that year, the Vietcong launched the Tet Offensive. It was a massive, coordinated attack on the United States Embassy in Saigon, as well as other key cities and military bases throughout South Vietnam. It was not a military success for the North Vietnamese, who were ultimately forced back over the border, but it was a political defeat for the United States. Seeing images on television of the embassy under siege and the fierce fighting taking place, many Americans realized that the government's optimistic predictions about the war's imminent end were not realistic. Much of the American media, including respected television anchorman Walter Cronkite, spoke out against the war.

On campuses around the country, college students held protests condemning the war. In 1969, President Richard M. Nixon began withdrawing troops, but later that year the fighting escalated again. In April 1970, President Nixon announced he was expanding the fighting to Cambodia, and students erupted in protest. The protests turned deadly in May 1970, when National Guardsmen were called to Kent State University in Ohio to help control the protesters. The Guardsmen opened fire on the students, killing four and injuring nine. Two weeks later, police shot and killed two protestors at Jackson State University in Mississippi. These two incidents are still bitterly remembered.

Vietnam veterans returning from the war often found themselves the enemy in the eyes of their peers. Unlike previous veterans of foreign wars in American history, these men and women were not welcomed home with parades and glory. Many returned to the United States with drug or alcohol problems. Many soldiers in Vietnam wanted to dull both the pain of being in an unpopular war far from home and the fear of imminent death. In *The Last Juror*, this situation is shown through Bubba Crockett and his friends. All of them are soured by their war experiences. Large numbers of young men publicly burned their draft cards, and thousands who were drafted fled to Canada, Australia, or other countries. Sam Ruffin makes this choice in the novel, spurred on by his friends and siblings. President Jimmy Carter pardoned all draft evaders in 1978—almost 10,000 people.

Public protest against the war grew during the early 1970s. In 1973, a formal peace treaty was signed between the United States and Vietnam, and President Nixon began the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The war in Vietnam finally ended on April 30, 1975, when

Saigon fell to the Vietcong. The bitterness of the war years has dulled, but the memory has not, which is evident whenever the United States faces a new war. One of the favorite cries of the anti-war movement is inevitably, "not another Vietnam."

Critical Overview

When *The Last Juror* was published in January 2004, the book was released to mixed reviews. Critics expecting a "typical" Grisham legal thriller usually gave the book a poor review. But critics open to reading the book as a novel with no expectations for certain genre conventions were more positive.

Publishers Weekly gives the book a starred review, indicating the book is considered of "out-standing" quality. The anonymous reviewer says:

Grisham has spent the last few years stretching his creative muscles through a number of genres: his usual legal thrillers (*The Summons, The King of Torts*, etc.), a literary novel (*The Painted House* [sic]), a Christmas book (*Skipping Christmas*) and a high school football elegy (*Bleachers*). This experimentation seems to have imbued his writing with a new strength, giving exuberant life to this compassionate, compulsively readable story of a young man's growth from callowness to something approaching wisdom.

The review concludes with high praise indeed:

Grisham tells the sad, heroic, moving stories of the eccentric inhabitants of Clanton, a small town balanced between the pleasures and perils of the old and the new South. The novel is heartfelt, wise, suspenseful and funny, one of the best Grishams ever.

Other critics, such as Ron Berthel of the Associated Press, were not as generous in their praise, but still liked the book. He notes that the book

is … a homey tale about a small-town newspaper and its young master growing up together, and a social observation of the effects that rapidly changing times—school desegregation, the Vietnam War, illegal drug use and the demise of small businesses at the hands of national "big box" retailers—have on life in a slow-paced Southern town.

And while "suspense and thrills aren't the main focus of this novel, Grisham knows how to keep the pages turning."

Matt Grady of America's Intelligence Wire would agree. He writes that Willie's first person narrative provides "a fresh, vibrant touch to the story." Grady also appreciates "the comical supporting characters including crooked lawyers and nosy reporters." Grady writes that "these elements combined with foreboding suspense and action make *The Last Juror* a smooth, entertaining read."

Dierdre Donohue, writing for *USA Today*, argues that there are two Grishams: one who writes "jet-fueled legal thrillers" and another who writes more personal novels about things like "religious faith and its transformative power." In *The Last Juror* there is both. Like the reviewer from *Publisher's Weekly*, Donohue rates this book highly: "The novel will satisfy those with an appetite for legal thrillers and those who believe Grisham

possesses more talent than those breathless page-turners sometimes reveal. It ranks among his best-written and most atmospheric novels."

Donohue does note one flaw in the novel. "Although the novel's characters are memorable, Grisham uses a heavy trowel to shape them." She remarks that characters in the book are either saints, like Miss Callie, or devils, like the Padgitts.

Richard Dyer of the *Boston Globe* sees the book as flawed, but showing an improvement in Grisham's skill as a novelist. He writes that Grisham is expanding as a writer, and suggests Grisham's "ambitions and skills aren't lined up yet, but the ambition is more focused, and the skill is coming along."

Some critics were disappointed in the book. Jennifer Reese at *Entertainment Weekly* writes that Grisham's attempt to combine a character-driven novel and a legal thriller is not altogether successful. She calls the book a "salty snack, a tasty, nonnutritious, and ultimately unsatisfying page-turner …".

New Statesman writer Mark Bearn is even more scathing in his review. He writes, "Sadly, it is a book without plot, purpose or even any pleasure for the reader, simply page after page of deep-fried Southern cliche." He goes on to attack Grisham's writing as a whole by saying that "Despite their clumsy plots, paper-thin characters and shocking grammar," Grisham's earlier books were "readable" and "surprisingly effective morality tales." However, he adds, as time goes on, Grisham has become more ambitious as a writer and "less accomplished." Bearn finds Grisham's characterizations in the novel lacking. He finds Miss Callie "absurdly angelic" and says that Grisham treats readers to "a parade of formulaic characters." He finishes his review of the novel with this analysis:

A plot, or a hard look at the racial divisions that make Mississippi the poorest and most unequal state in America, might have compensated for Grisham's lack of literary skill. Without either of these we are left with nothing.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Brantley is a writer and editor of literary reference and academic subject texts. In this essay, she examines the portrayal of racism in recent-past settings by modern writers, and how John Grisham's The Last Juror *treats the subject in the twenty-first century*.

In August 2005, the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* revealed that people's feelings about something could be changed by manipulating their memories of it. Convinced that they had had a bad experience with strawberry ice cream as a child, adults turned away from the treat they had previously enjoyed. Persuaded that they had once loved asparagus, test subjects reported liking it more than before. The human impulse to believe that what is true today has always been true is by no means limited to such tricks of the taste buds. In 1963, George Wallace became governor of Alabama and proclaimed, "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" in his inaugural speech. He raised the Confederate Battle Flag atop the state's capitol dome that year. A generation later, tradition-minded Alabamians fought the removal of the controversial symbol, arguing that it had flown there since the Civil War and to remove it would dishonor their noble Confederate ancestors. Whether through an exercise in propaganda or poetic license, American writers have also shaped their readers' present perceptions by adjusting their past attitudes. Following in the footsteps of Mark Twain, Margaret Mitchell, and Harper Lee, John Grisham reaches into the recent past and retrieves a new memory in *The Last Juror*.

While racism is often mentioned in the book, its presence provides more atmosphere than action. *The Last Juror* is not a fable with a moral about the wrongness of racism. It is a crime drama. The basic story can be summarized in a few lines: A man kills a woman. A young newspaperman sensationalizes the story to sell papers. A woman has lived a remarkable life despite hardships. She breaks ground by being selected to sit on the jury in the murder trial. The community is shocked by the outcome. Some members of the jury are murdered—but why, and by whom?

If all the players are either black or white, this cast of core characters—the murderer, the victim, the reporter, the juror, and the avenger—may have thirty different configurations and create almost as many race dramas. Or, as is the case in *The Last Juror*, the color of the participants' skin proves immaterial to the story's action. The juror is black, and the other core players are white. There are moments when the reader fears she will be harmed by racist whites in her community, but not only is she not harmed, she is not threatened. The issue of race in *The Last Juror* is a red herring, used to add suspense and keep the readers guessing. It serves as a misdirection because modern readers are primed to expect race, when mentioned, to be an issue.

Storytellers have always spun yarns about the long ago and the far away. A culture's values are both reflected in and supported by its mythology. Heroes like Gilgamesh, Odysseus, and King Arthur illustrated lessons of bravery, humility, cunning, hospitality, chivalry, and piety. Each also gave future generations of his countrymen an ancestral hero with a legacy of which to be proud. As literacy and printing technology grew,

readers started enjoying adventures and romances set in the present day and written in accessible language, in addition to the myths and fables of yore. By the nineteenth century, masters like Leo Tolstoy and Victor Hugo were making statements about contemporary politics in Russia and France with stories set during major events in each country's recent past. Writing just after the American Civil War about events in the years just prior, Mark Twain (1835–1910) used the recent-past technique and a child's point of view to evoke compassion for African Americans.

Immediately after the Civil War, the U.S. government suspended the rights of the rebel states in a period known as Reconstruction. It passed laws to establish civil rights for newly freed slaves, but resistance to such forced progress gave rise to organized racism and violence as defeated white southerners sought to reclaim a sense of power. When Reconstruction ended in 1877, the stage was set for the Jim Crow era, a period of legalized racial segregation designed to systematically oppress African Americans. Published in 1885 and set "Forty to Fifty Years Ago," Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* shows the hero's struggle with his conscience while trying to do the right thing. After faking his death and leaving home, Huck takes up with a runaway slave named Jim, whose friendship and company are the foundation for the novel's adventures. Although he loves his friend, Huck feels that he should turn in the fugitive slave. He prays for the resolve to turn Jim in but cannot bring himself to do the "right" thing:

I was letting on to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth say I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie—I found that out…. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: "All right then, I'll *go* to hell[.]"

Huck accepts his inability to betray Jim as a flaw in his own sinful nature rather than a flaw of the society that expects him to regard another human as less than himself. That he does the morally right thing, even when contrary to the legally right thing, reveals something admirable about Huck. Through the brave decision of a thoroughly likeable and fully American character, Twain gives his readers a hero they can identify with, respect, and honor as they, too, do the moral thing. Huck recognizes Jim's humanity long before the lawmakers in Washington try to legislate that recognition. Following his example, Twain's readers can also be compassionate without feeling like some federal law has told them how to feel.

Grisham uses a different tactic to let his readers feel compassion. In one scene in *The Last Juror*, he describes the contrasting reactions to public school desegregation from both communities it is about to affect:

The white parents were angry and frightened and I saw several women crying. The fateful day had finally arrived. At the black school there was an air of victory. The parents were concerned, but they were also elated that their children would finally be enrolled in the better schools.

By representing the black community's point of view, Grisham underscores the righteousness of the wronged party without preaching or even pointing out which side that is. His readers get to feel good about themselves for knowing that they, too, are on the side of right.

Written during the Jim Crow era, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) gave readers license to remember the Civil War in a new way. Mitchell (1900–1949) experienced the beginning of the breakdown of the Jim Crow South as an adult in Atlanta. During the Red Summer of 1919, northern and southern U.S. cities alike witnessed more than two dozen race riots. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld black defendants' rights to fairness before the law with landmark cases in the 1920s and 1930s in which African Americans were charged with violence against whites. Membership in the Ku Klux Klan peaked in the 1920s, and the poverty and insecurity of the Great Depression of the 1930s fostered animosity toward minorities as people competed for scarce jobs and resources.

Gone With the Wind gave readers a picture of benign slavery they could embrace, as well as a dashing, romantic, racist hero to admire. Mitchell's Rhett Butler is a charming rogue who ignores conventions and lives for his own selfish pleasure. In a line meant to reveal something good about Rhett's character, the narrator notes, "Even Rhett, conscienceless scamp that he was, had killed a negro for being 'uppity to a lady.'" The reader understands that being a murderer is preferable to letting a white lady endure a perceived affront. Later, Scarlett, the story's protagonist, tries to defend the use of white convict labor by comparing it to slavery: "Ah, but that was different. Slaves were neither miserable nor unfortunate. The negroes were far better off under slavery than they were now under freedom, and if she didn't believe it, just look about her!" Regardless of whether Mitchell's Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece served to defend its author's heritage and justify her beliefs, it did allow its readers to hold their chins up and look down their noses at the idea that there was anything wrong with being a racist.

Grisham turns this approach on its head. While Rhett is a likeable racist, Lucien Wilbanks, the defense attorney in *The Last Juror*, is an unsympathetic progressive. "He was the only white member of the NAACP in Ford County, which alone was enough to get you shot there. He didn't care." Wilbanks is mean, unpopular, and one of the novel's bad guys, but he is also bravely on the right side of the race question.

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) was written in the thick of the civil rights movement, between the 1954 decision that outlawed segregation in public schools and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Set in the 1930s in Jim Crow Alabama, the novel was inspired by the case of the Scottsboro boys, nine black teenagers wrongfully convicted of raping two white women in Alabama in 1931. All but the youngest one were sentenced to death for the crime, but all were eventually released through appeals, pardons, or parole. In two separate decisions related to the case, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the defendants' right to due process and fair trials.

Atticus Finch, the protagonist of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is a white lawyer defending an innocent black man accused of raping a white woman. He does not win, nor does he

expect to, but he behaves bravely and morally in the face of societal pressure to do otherwise.

Finch is a hero like Huck Finn: one that readers can look up to as a model to emulate in a confusing time of change. The idea that all citizens deserved life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness was one that some white Americans officially resisted into the 1970s. The message of *To Kill a Mockingbird* could be that white people are no better and no worse than black people, black people are no less deserving of civil rights than white people, and it is up to white people to look out for black people. The novel lumps African Americans in with simpletons, bugs, and birds—all of which deserve compassion and protection from white people. Early in the book, a neighbor explains to Atticus's son why it is a sin to kill a mockingbird: "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us." Later, the boy prevents his sister from killing a harmless roly-poly bug with the argument "they don't bother you." The novel ends with the girl agreeing with her father that they should protect their mysterious, emotionally troubled neighbor, because to do otherwise would be "like shootin' a mockingbird."

Atticus Finch shows the readers how to act righteously while assuring them that they can remain superior. He is painted as a hero to the dignified and stoic black community. He believes they are equal but does not seem to mind keeping them separate. Rather than grief and outrage when an innocent man is sent to prison, the black members of the community stand as a gesture of respect when the white lawyer passes by. This exchange between Finch and his African American housekeeper about the gifts of food the black townspeople leave to show their gratitude underscores the fact that heroic behavior in one generation may not only be inadequate but actually offensive to the next:

Calpurnia said, "This was all 'round the back steps when I got here this morning. They—they 'preciate what you did, Mr. Finch. They—they aren't oversteppin' themselves, are they?"

Atticus's eyes filled with tears. He did not speak for a moment. "Tell them I'm very grateful," he said. "Tell them—tell them they must never do this again. Times are too hard."

Even if the exchange does not suggest that there are circumstances in which the gift-givers might step out of place, it does say that white people do not owe black people the most basic observance of good manners—to say "thank you" to people who give them gifts and pay them compliments. If Lee was able to convince readers in the 1960s to be more like Atticus Finch, she contributed to progress—not triumph. If Finch had made African American friends with whom he socialized at their homes, at his home, and in public, like the white protagonist of *The Last Juror*, the bar would have been higher.

The Last Juror (2004) offers a new reason to look to the recent past: to reassure readers that they do not need to talk about race at every opportunity in order to prove

they are intelligent, evolved, progressive beings. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Toni Morrison claims that "the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture." Grisham by no means ignores it. He portrays overt racism in 1970s Mississippi as a fact of the setting, like the hot summers or the native drawl, but does not make any specific judgment condemning it. However, *The Last Juror* is filled with portrayals of racism and its effects. Grisham does not downplay or ignore racism; he simply opts not to make it the center of his tale. He populates his fictional Clanton, Mississippi, with rich, full personalities and makes sure that neither the town's black citizens nor its white citizens have a monopoly on silliness or dignity, evil or virtue. Through the voice of narrator Willie Traynor, Grisham comes across as clearly anti-racist, but he does not belabor the point. He trusts his twenty-first-century audience to share his feeling and gets on with the story.

Grisham does not use *The Last Juror* to influence his readers' opinions about race. He paints neither a prettier nor uglier picture of the past, and he does not ask his readers to feel better or worse about themselves or their history. He does not suggest that the fight against racism is won, or even close to over. His debut novel, *A Time to Kill* (1989), set in present-day Clanton, addresses the issue head on. With *The Last Juror*, he gives a multifaceted portrayal of life in the small-town South. The Twains, Mitchells, and Lees that came before him made sure he does not have to educate his readers about racism; they already know. Thanks to the modern reader's sophistication, Grisham is able to reach a new level of complexity and realism in his depiction of the recent past.

In his opinion on the 1972 decision that deemed all American death penalty statutes illegal, Thurgood Marshall, the country's first black Supreme Court justice, wrote, "In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute." In 2004 with the inhabitants of his fictional Clanton, Grisham came closer to paying himself this tribute than most other American writers could imagine.

Source: Margaret Brantley, Critical Essay on *The Last Juror*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Critical Essay #2

In the following interview with Jordan, Grisham discusses how his many books, as well as the filmed adaptations of those books, compare to each other.

John Grisham's office, a stunning loft space overlooking downtown Charlottesville, Va., is a long, lean expanse of wood floors studded with curvy red and plum sofas and an imposing conference table. Despite the wood and glass and steel, it's a warm space, decorated with both the expected (movie posters, early reviews) and the unexpected (one of his old Mississippi law firm business cards, encased in a small frame). Grisham, 49, strides in five minutes late, apologetic. He's driven from his farm, a 204-acre spread south of the city that he shares with wife Renee and daughter Shea (son Ty is away at college). Nursing an Italian coffee, he ponders a list of his 17 best-sellers and 9 movies. "By the time I'm finished with one book I'm always thinking about the next one," he says, laughing, "so I can't remember a lot of detail. But I'll wing it."

He doesn't have to wing it, of course. Here's a short list of his favorites—and a few not-so-favorites:

Grisham was a small-town lawyer and state legislator in Mississippi when he picked up a pen and pad and started *A Time to Kill* (1989). "I didn't know what I was doing when I wrote that book. It's the only book out of 17 that I wrote without a deadline and without the knowledge that it was going to get published, so I really took my time with it. Still, I go back and look at it occasionally and see a lot of rookie mistakes … Too many long sentences and too much flowery prose.

Now, 20 years later, I'm really tired of the Ku Klux Klan stuff. When you write about the South it's got to be about race, and I wish I hadn't devoted so much of the book to the Klan because they don't deserve it. That's one thing I'd change."

After spending three years laboring over *A Time to Kill*—and not having much to show for it—Grisham admits that *The Firm* (1991) was "a naked stab at commercial fiction": "If it hadn't worked the second time, I probably would've stopped for a while. I like [*The Firm*] a lot because I've always liked the character of Mitch McDeere, and the hook, and the ending—in spite of what Hollywood did to it." (Grisham ended with the main couple stealing Mob money and going on a permanent Caribbean vacation, while director Sydney Pollack, claiming he was sick of "yuppie endings," sent Tom Cruise and Jeanne Tripplehorn back to their Boston roots, poorer but wiser.) The movie: "I had nothing to do with it. I went to the set twice. Stephen King is a buddy, and he told me a long time ago, 'They're just movies. They cannot change a word of what you've written. It's somebody else's interpretation. Take the money and run.'… I thought [Cruise] did a good job. He played the innocent young associate very well."

Hoping to capitalize on *The Firm*'s success, Grisham churned out *The Pelican Brief* (1992) in two months flat: "You know the movie *Three Days of the Condor*, the CIA thriller [directed by Pollack] with Robert Redford and Faye Dunaway? The book was a

deliberate effort to outspace Condor, to have all this stuff going on, so the reader could not turn the pages fast enough. But I think it shows some damage because it was written so fast." The movie: "I met Alan Pakula before he bought the film rights, and he wanted my input. I read the screenplay, and it followed the book … That's all you can ask for. The movie was very popular. I though Julia [Roberts] was a good choice … I had a problem with Denzel [Washington], not as actor, but in the book he's a white guy … I didn't write the guy as a black guy in the book. Some of my characters are white and some are black. If you're going to make a dramatic change, give me a good reason. And there really was no good reason. And I think it was kind of awkward; in the book there was more of a romance toward the end between the two. In the movie it was almost like they couldn't because one was black and one was white."

In its first year out, *The Client* (1993) sold 3 million copies; it even overtook the behemoth *The Bridges of Madison County* on the best-seller charts for a few weeks. "*The Client* was, by the benefit of 10 years' hindsight, by far the weakest book … because of the kid hiring the lawyer, the kid knowing where the body's buried … There's a hundred pages of fluff in that book." The movie: "*The Client* may be my least favorite book, but it's a really popular movie. The *Pelican Brief* and *Client* were much closer to the books than *The Firm* … I thought Susan Sarandon was wonderful."

The Chamber (1994), about a death-penalty case, was a departure for Grisham, the first in which he grappled with social issues: "It was probably the most difficult book I had to write. Growing up in a strict Southern Baptist house-hold you think capital punishment's wonderful—line 'em up, shoot 'em, hang 'em. And the book flipped me. I wasn't expecting that. I spent time on death row, and it had a profound impact on me. It was difficult to write—I just couldn't get the guy to the gas chamber. And so it became a very long book. The only book I've missed the deadline on. But it's a book I like a lot. A book I'm proud of." The movie: "A disaster. A train wreck from the beginning. It could not have been handled worse by those involved, including me. I made a fundamental error when I sold the film rights before I finished writing the book. It was a dreadful movie. Gene Hackman was the only good thing in it."

Next he tackled the insurance industry in *The Rainmaker* (1995): "I got to unload on insurance companies, which is a lot of fun. I sued 'em for 10 years when I was a lawyer … *Rainmaker* was … the first time I used first-person narration, and I realized I really, really liked it … The challenge with *Rainmaker*, also with *The Runaway Jury* [1996], is that courtroom stuff of a civil nature is unbelievably dull. And so you weigh the balance of pace with being legally accurate. I hate this television stuff with courtroom scenes that would just make any lawyer want to vomit. I don't want to do that." The movie: "To me it's the best adaptation of any of 'em. [Francis Ford] Coppola really wanted my involvement, for whatever it's worth. And I love the movie. It's so well done. And it came out a few weeks before *Titanic* and got swamped."

There's no moralizing in *The Partner* (1997), just good writing about a greedy lawyer on the lam: "It's one of my favorite stories, one of the trickiest ones, flashing back and then forward, nabbing the lawyer and then watching him wiggle out of it. There are times when my wife says, 'Would you just stop preaching and tell a story?' And I listen to that."

Grisham tried a new tack *In The Brethren* (2000)—humor. It's the tale of three jailed judges who run a blackmailing scam from their cells: "I thought [Brethren] was hilarious! It was supposed to be hilarious! It's based on a real story—though obviously I was careful to fictionalize it—at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. *Brethren* was a fun story, fun to write, but one with no redeeming social value whatsoever."

Grisham got rave reviews for *A Painted House* (2001), his first nonlegal thriller: "Well, probably my best book. The best writing. Probably the best story and the best characters. It's a sweet childhood memoir, even though it was published as fiction. The first seven years of my life—I was that kid, I lived on that farm, with my grandparents, playing baseball with Mexicans. Once I got all the setting and characters in place, I just sort of fictionalized everything …"

In his new book, *The Last Juror*—not strictly a legal thriller—Grisham takes readers back to Ford County, the fictional Mississippi county that was also the setting of *A Time to Kill*. "I wrote a hundred pages of it in the fall of 1989. I was going to write a Ford County book and a legal thriller, back and forth, and write two kinds of books, so I had the story all mapped out, and then *The Firm* went crazy, so *The Last Juror* got shoved to the back burner. But I've learned a lot over the years. After 15 years, I have greater expectations for my books."

Source: Tina Jordan, "Grisham V Grisham: John Grisham, undisputed champ of the legal thriller, issues a summary judgment on *THE LAST JUROR*, his latest novel, along with verdicts on some of his previous best-sellers," in *Entertainment Weekly*, No. 751, February 13, 2004, p. 41.

Critical Essay #3

In the following review, Dyer argues that The Last Juror *is Grisham's most literary novel to date, and is more than just a legal thriller*.

[Text Not Available]

[Text Not Available]

Source: Richard Dyer, "Book Review *The Last Juror* By John Grisham," in *Boston Globe*, February 2, 2004, p. E1.

Quotes

"I studied journalism with a hangover. In the early days at Syracuse, I aspired to be an investigative reporter with the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. I wanted to save the world by uncovering corruption and environmental abuse and government waste and the injustice suffered by the weak and oppressed." Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 8

"There was a widely held but unprofessed belief in Mississippi that a good Sheriff must be a little crooked to ensure law and order. Whiskey, whoring, and gambling were simply facts of life, and a good Sheriff must be knowledgeable in these affairs to properly regulate them and protect the Christians." Part 1, Chapter 3, pg. 33

"Roughly twelve months earlier I had been living on the third floor of a fraternity house in Syracuse, New York, attending class occasionally, working hard to be a good soldier in the sexual revolution, drinking prodigious amounts of alcohol, smoking pot, sleeping until noon anytime I felt like it, and for exercise I'd hustle over to the next antiwar rally and scream at the police. I thought I had problems. How I'd gone from there to a witness chair in the Ford County courtroom was suddenly very unclear to me." Part 1, Chapter 10, pg. 124

"But to run such a grand and dignified profile of an outstanding black family on the front page was a giant step for racial tolerance in the town. I didn't see it that way. It was just a good human interest story about Miss Callie Ruffin and her extraordinary family." Part 1, Chapter 12, pg. 142

"At first I couldn't tell if she was anxious or excited. I'm not sure she knew either. The first black female voter might now become the first black juror. She had never backed away from a challenge, but she had grave moral concerns about judging another person." Part 1, Chapter 13, pg. 151

"During the trial, I had seen in her face a certain amount of pride. She was sitting where no black person had ever sat, shoulder to shoulder with fellow citizens, judging a white person for the first time in Ford County." Part 1, Chapter 19, pg. 223

"I was quite proud of the town. In the aftermath of a brutal murder and its baffling verdict, we had rallied, fought back, and spoken clearly that we would not tolerate corruption." Part 2, Chapter 27, pg. 312

"What a waste I said over and over as I walked the streets alone, headed generally back to the office. That night, still alone, I cursed myself for being so silent, so cowardly. I was the editor of the newspaper, dammit! Whether I felt entitled to the position or not, I was the only one in town. If I felt strongly about an issue, then I certainly had the power and position to editorialize." Part 2, Chapter 28, pg. 315

"I was driven by a belief that to preserve the downtown area of Clanton we had to protect the stores and shops, cafes and offices around the square. Once we began

sprawling, there would be no end to it. The town would spread in a dozen directions, each one siphoning off its own little slice of old Clanton." Part 3, Chapter 35, pg. 386

"I was young, still single though I was tired of being lonely and living alone in a mansion with three leftover Hocutt cats that refused to die. I had accepted the reality that I would not find a bride in Ford County." Part 3, Chapter 35, pg. 393

"On the other hand, I suspected the town was weary of me. Because of my preachy opposition to the war in Vietnam, I would always be considered a radical liberal. And I did little to diminish this reputation. As the paper grew and the profits increased, and as a direct result my skin got thicker, I editorialized more and more." Part 3, Chapter 41, pg. 445

"Adventure was calling me, and I now had the means to answer. And it was a sad drive because I was giving up such a large and rewarding part of my life. The paper and I had grown and matured together; me as an adult, it as a prosperous entity." Part 3, Chapter 42, pg. 454

"At sunrise, I was sitting on the porch outside my office. I wanted to be alone, to have a good cry in private. The crying around my house was more than I could bear. As I had dreamed of traveling around the world, I had the recurring vision of returning to Clanton with gifts for Miss Callie." Part 3, Chapter 44, pg. 485

"As the town slowly came to life below me, I walked to my desk, shoved some boxes out of the way, and sat down. I took my pen, and for a long time stared at a blank notepad. Eventually, slowly, with great agony, I began the last obituary." Part 3, Chapter 44, pg. 486

Adaptations

- *The Last Juror* was released in an unabridged audio version on CD by Random House Audio in 2004. It is narrated by Michael Beck.

What Do I Read Next?

- Grisham's *A Time to Kill* (1988) was his first book, and it is also set in Clanton, Mississippi in the fictional Ford County, so it is an interesting way of seeing some characters' first appearances in print. It also has similar themes but is more of a thriller.
- *The Summons* (2002) is the second book Grisham set in Clanton. Not really a thriller, it has been called a morality play by some reviewers—a story that tells readers how they should behave by showing them characters who do the absolute wrong thing.
- R. M. Leich's *Not My Father's War* (2004), a novel written by a Vietnam veteran, is the story of a wealthy young man from Nashville, Tennessee who tries to keep up the family tradition of service to country and patriotism, but who learns that Vietnam is unlike any other American war.
- George C. Herring's *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 3rd edition (2001) is the textbook most highly recommended for understanding the Vietnam War. The last chapter, "The Post-War and the Legacy of Vietnam," has been revised to reflect the dramatic changes of the past decade, and it analyzes the influence that Vietnam continues to have on Americans.

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the significance of the historical setting in which this book was written. How would the story be different if it had been set in the 1950s?

Imagine you are Willie Traynor's boss, and give him a job performance review on the job he did as editor and publisher of *The Ford County Times?*

Discuss the significance of Calia Ruffin's character to the story.

Discuss the book's ending. Do you think it was a happy ending or not?

The author dealt with some historically controversial subjects in the book. Discuss the author's treatment of such controversial subjects as the death penalty, the Vietnam War, civil rights and forced desegregation.

Discuss the significance of Calia Ruffin's death to the end of the story.

Flash forward one year. Where do you imagine Willie Traynor is, and what is he doing?

Do you feel that the author was overly critical or not critical enough of the media and small town newspapers?

- While most of the violence in *The Last Juror* is associated with the Padgitt trial, in reality, desegregation was quite violent in Mississippi. Research Medgar Evers's and the NAACP's efforts toward desegregation in Mississippi. What were some examples of the violence faced by these civil rights workers? What kinds of sacrifices did they make? How did their sacrifices benefit all residents of Mississippi? Write a paper detailing the information that you find.
- Do some research on Vietnam veterans and draft evaders on the Internet. Why did they make the choices they did? Write a short story from the point of view of a young man facing the draft in 1970. In the story, explain the decision you would make and why.
- List some of the differences you might find between the lives of black people and the lives of white people in Mississippi in the 1970s. Would this list be the same in your part of the country? If not, what are some of the reasons for the differences? If the lists are similar, why is that? Compare this list to a list of the differences between the lives of black people and white people today. Has there been a big change? Discuss your findings with your classmates.
- Watch the film version of *A Time to Kill*. In what ways do the themes of the film echo the themes of *The Last Juror*? Write a synopsis for a film version of *The Last Juror*. Would you make it a thriller like *A Time to Kill*, or would you focus more on the character-driven parts of the book? How would you handle the long time period covered in the novel?

Further Study

Appy, Christian G, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*, Viking Books, 2003.

This book is designed to be an oral history, giving voice to people from all sides of the Vietnam War—officials from both the United States and Vietnam, as well as words from widows of soldiers, civilians who helped in the war effort as well as war protestors.

Fireside, Harvey and Sarah Betsey Fuller, *Brown v. Board of Education: Equal Schooling for All*, Landmark Supreme Court Cases Series, Enslow Publishers, 1994.

An objective and well-written book, aimed at giving high school students a solid understanding of this groundbreaking case. To help readers understand, it includes photos, quotations from both sides of the battle and explanations of the judges' opinions.

Galt, Margot Fortunato, *Stop This War!: American Protest of the Conflict in Vietnam*, Lerner Publishing, 2000.

Galt interviewed many former conscientious objectors who give their viewpoint about the Vietnam war. She also gives information about protest groups, the war policies of Presidents Johnson and Nixon, and the Kent State killings.

Maraniss, David, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*, Simon & Schuster, 2003.

This book gives a good overview of the peace movement in America, focusing on Wisconsin and the battle situation in Vietnam.

Walter, Mildred Pitts, *Mississippi Challenge*, Simon & Shuster Children's Publishing, 1992.

Walter writes an objective and thorough non-fiction book in which she outlines the history of blacks in Mississippi from before the Civil War through the mid-1960s. She paints a stark picture, especially of how whites in Mississippi tried to prevent blacks from voting. The book includes good notes and a bibliography.

Bibliography

Bearden, Michelle, "An Interview with John Grisham," in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 240, No. 8, February 22, 1993, pp. 70-71.

Bearn, Mark, "Southern Comfort," in *New Statesman*, Vol. 133, February 23, 2004, pp. 54-56.

Berthel, Ron, "'Legal Thriller' Only One Way to Describe Grisham's New Novel," for *The Associated Press*, February 3, 2004, BC cycle.

Blitzer, Charles, "From the Center," in *Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 18, Issue 3, Summer 94, p. 160.

Donohue, Dierdre, "*Last Juror* is a Tale of 2 Grishams," in *USA Today*, January 27, 2004,Final Edition, Life Section, p. 1D.

Dyer, Richard, "Book Review, *The Last Juror*," in *Boston Globe*, February 2, 2004, Third Edition, Living Section, p. E1.

Grady, Matt, "Perspective of *The Last Juror* Adds to Grisham's Writing," in *America's Intelligence Wire*, March 11, 2004.

Grisham, John, *The Last Juror*, Random House, 2004.

Hunter, Marjorie, "A Re-Entry Plan," in *New York Times*, September 17, 1974, p. 1.

John Grisham Online, www.randomhouse.com/features/grisham/

"*The Last Juror* Book Review," in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 251, February 2, 2004, p. 59.

Mohr, Charles, "10,000 Affected Now," in *New York Times*, January 22, 1977, p. 47.

Oberdorfer, Don, "Tet: Who Won?," in *Smithsonian*, Vol. 35, Issue 8, November 2004, pp. 117-22.

Reese, Jennifer, *Losing Appeal? Legal Pyrotechnics and Melodrama Awkwardly Mix in John Grisham's "The Last Juror,"* in *Entertainment Weekly*, February 13, 2004. p. 74.

"School Desegregation in Mississippi," *University of Southern Mississippi's Civil Rights Documentation Project*, www.usm.edu/crdp/html/cd/desegregation.htm

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535